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SABINA ZEMBRA

SABINA ZEMBRA

A Novel

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

IN THREE VOLUMES

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SABINA ZEMBRA

CHAPTER XIX

A HONEYMOON VISIT

THE newly-wedded couple went down to Boscastle on the Cornish coast. Now Boscastle is a picturesque little place; but the occupations it affords are scanty; and in a very short time Mr. Fred Foster began to find the afternoon hanging rather heavily on his hands. Not that he was at all a dull companion. He had seen a good deal of life; was a shrewd judge of character; and could describe people in a semi-facetious vein that was at least meant to be amusing. Why, one whole morning—these two walking the while along the high Downs overlooking the western sea—he entertained her with an account of the various modes of concealing their emotion adopted by certain noble sportsmen while looking on at a race in which they were interested; how the Duke of Belvoir invariably found something wrong with the working of his field-glass; how Lord Cranesfoot seized the moment for selecting a

big cigar, proceeding to chew the same without taking the trouble to light it; how Mr. De Gottheimer (no matter how pale his features might be) would affect to care nothing at all about the race, but rather to be surprised at the excitement of the roaring crowd around him; and so forth. Nevertheless, these walks along the Downs and along the country lanes and out by the little harbour to the hill facing the Atlantic, became a little monotonous; and Fred Foster was a frank-spoken person.

'Dame Durden,' said he, in his playful fashion, 'listen to me. I suppose it wouldn't be quite according to the correct card to ask a young lady on her wedding-trip to visit her mother-in-law, would it? Beginning too soon, eh, to face the trials of life?'

'I will go with pleasure,' Sabina said promptly.

'You don't mean that?'

'I do.'

'Then we'll be off to-morrow morning.'

This resolve seemed to bring quite a new cheerfulness and liveliness into the atmosphere; and that evening at dinner he said, 'You know, Sabie, I wouldn't have made the suggestion if the Mater was like any one else; but she's just as good as gold; and she'll be awfully proud to see you. Indeed there are several reasons why it will be a very good move. We shall be there by the First; and I daresay I shall be able to pick up a few birds. But that's not the chief thing—the chief thing is this: that I want

you to set seriously to work and make a poor thing of my pa.'

She looked up inquiringly.

'Oh, you can do it,' he said, with an air of sarcastic approval. 'You are a first-class performer, when you like, for all your innocent eyes——'

'But what do you mean?' she said.

'Well, I'm talking about the art of making a fool of people,' he answered blandly; 'and if there's any one can beat you at that, I've never met the person. Why, there's not a man nor a woman about this place, nor a boy nor a girl either, who isn't all smiles and simpers whenever you make your appearance; and the housekeeper brings flowers for the "dear, sweet young lady"; and the slavey washing the steps grins to you as if your going past her was a favour. Oh yes, you can do it. Why, you left those Wygrams in a perfectly gelatinous condition; I don't suppose Janie Wygram has done crying yet. Now I want you to try a little of that same business on my pa, and see what you can do with him. He's an uncommon rough subject, I can tell you; you'll have your work cut out for you; but if you can manage it, it will be a rare good thing for both of us. You'll have no trouble with the Mater. She's gone; she collapsed the minute she saw you. But if you make up your mind to go for the old man—and you can when you like—there's no saying what he mayn't do for us. You see, picking ferns along these Cornish lanes is

all very fine; and so is sitting on the top of a cliff and wondering how long it will be to lunch-time; but when we get back to London there will have to be some considering of ways and means. Of course it will be all right; you needn't be afraid; but in the meantime you might as well be civil to the old gentleman.'

'Oh yes, I'll be civil to him,' said Sabina laughing; she did not attribute too serious a motive to these wise counsels.

And doubtless it was chiefly as a joke that Fred Foster pretended to regard this trip into Buckinghamshire as the scheme of a couple of adventurers in sore need of money; and affected to advise Sabina as to how she should play her game. If the game was that of fascination, she had no need of his advice; it came naturally to her. From the moment that she set foot in the old-fashioned house just outside Missenden, the tall, pretty, refined-looking old lady who was mistress there became her daughter-in-law's bounden slave. She had come quickly to the door on hearing the wagonette drive up; the broad daylight—the open highway—she did not heed, though she was all trembling, and her eyes were filled with tears; the instant that Sabina alighted she was caught to this kind old lady's heart, and kissed again and again, without much regard for any passer-by. 'My dear!—my dear!' was all that was said; but she took Sabina's hand, and held it fast as she led her into the hall. She had scarce a word for her son. It was Sabina who

was to be attended to; it was Sabina that she must herself take to her room; it was Sabina who was helped to remove her things, and pressed to have tea or wine or anything she could fancy; and all the while there was a good deal of petting and stroking of hands, with an occasional trickling tear or two.

'She's a goner,' said Fred Foster to himself (he was left with the luggage in the hall); 'but I'm not so sure about the old man.'

By and by, when the hubbub of the arrival had quieted down, the son of the house—who had been pretty much neglected in the meanwhile—managed to get a few words in private with his wife.

'Look here, Sabie; I'm going along to see old Jakes—the keeper I've told you about, don't you remember?—and most likely I shan't be back till dinner-time. The Mater has her household affairs to look after—she goes through them like clockwork—you won't see much of her. But the old man is in the greenhouse—I saw him go in a minute ago—why don't you go and tackle him now? He's only snipping at his grapes; you've got a splendid chance. Off you go and do for him.'

She turned to him with a gravely innocent face; but there was some laughter in her eyes.

'I don't know what you mean. What am I to do?'

'Oh, of course, you don't know!' he retorted. 'You don't know how to do it at all! It wasn't you who knocked

young Lionel out of his senses in about a couple of minutes in the Pavilion Gardens?'

She thought for a moment; and then she laughed.

'Oh, do you remember that? Mrs. Wygram was angry with me about that. I am sure I did not know I had done anything.'

'Oh, you can do it very well. Just you go and try a little of the same kind of thing on my respected papa; but mind, he isn't two and twenty.'

Well, whether from mischief or idleness or careless good-nature, Sabina, being thus left to herself, thought she could not do better than go and talk to the old gentleman —who had but spoken a few words of welcome to her and returned to his labours. Her reception in the greenhouse, when she timidly opened the door, was not of the most cordial kind.

'Where's Fred?' the old gentleman said sharply.

'He has gone to see the gamekeeper, I think—shall I—shall I be in your way, sir, if I stay here a little while?'

'Left you alone already, has he?' the old man grumbled, and seemed disinclined for further conversation.

But Sabina had had long experience in the humouring of people. She began to ask a few questions. Soon he was telling her all about his grapes, with a touch of professional pride. She had praises for a country life. She was fond of a garden. What did he consider, now, gave him most satisfaction for all the care he expended—what

were the flowers he was most interested in? The next thing that happened was that the old gentleman found himself walking about in the open with this pretty daughter-in-law of his, showing her all his treasures, chatting to her quite briskly and cheerfully, and apparently vastly pleased with both himself and her.

That was but the beginning. When dinner-time arrived Fred Foster got back rather late, and had barely a couple of minutes to rush upstairs and wash his hands and brush his hair. When he came down again, what was his astonishment to find old Mr. Foster arrayed in an antiquated suit of evening dress, with a stiff white neckcloth, and a waistcoat of black satin adorned with flowers in coloured silk. Such a thing had not happened within the son's recollection.

'Hallo, father,' said he, 'this is rather formal, isn't it?'

'You may treat your wife as you please; I hope I know how to show respect for my daughter-in-law,' was the chilling rejoinder.

'Well, that's rather rough on me,' the son said good-humouredly. 'I didn't bring any evening dress. Why, you have always set your face against it.'

All during dinner, too, the old gentleman would have a monopoly of Sabina's conversation; and resented any casual intrusion of his son as if he had no right to be there at all. As for the gentle-featured mother, she did not say much; she was content to sit and look at this new-found beautiful

daughter, and to listen to her; and there were pride and a great affection very evident in the tender gray eyes. She had not been busy with her household matters all the afternoon; she had found time to ransack certain sacred repositories, and many were the bits of old-fashioned finery and lace and trinkets that she had resolved to bestow on Sabina. As she sat and looked at her she thought it would be very nice to put such or such a thing round Sabie's neck, and to fasten it in front with loving care. And there might be a kiss in return?—for she thought the girl was rather affectionate.

Mr. Fred Foster took his snubbing very patiently; he spoke a word now and again to his mother; and was well satisfied to see Sabina (as he would have phrased it) rising so rapidly to first favourite. Grown happy with a few glasses of port, the old gentleman was gallantry itself. Many a rare old story, hidden for years in the dusky recesses of his memory, saw the light once more; he was facetious, patronising, sarcastic by turns; and generally he meant to convey to her that the young fellows of his day were a dashing set, adepts in all the arts of love and war. And then, when dinner was over, and John the butler (who was also groom, and helped in the garden besides) had put the decanters on the table, old Mr. Foster filled Sabina's glass and his own, and bowed to her graciously.

'No speech-making, my dear,' said he; 'but I hope you see that you are very welcome in this house.'

'Haven't you got a little bit of a blessing for me, too, father?' Mr. Fred ventured to interpose.

'For you?' said the old gentleman, after a moment's hesitation. 'Well, I will say this for you, that at last you have done a sensible thing—the first you ever did in your life, I think.'

But the climax came later. Old Mr. Foster had several odd ways and habits, to which he adhered with the rigour begotten of a methodical country life; and one of these was his invariable custom of going into the spacious stone-floored kitchen, the last thing at night, to smoke a pipe or two of tobacco in solitary communion with himself. Mrs. Foster could not bear the odour of tobacco in any of the rooms, not even in the greenhouse; the household went early to bed; the maids, before leaving, had everything trimly swept and tidied up; and there was a small wooden table placed in front of the smouldering fire, with decanters, a jar of tobacco, and two long churchwardens. The second churchwarden was supposed to be placed there for the service of Mr. Fred; but as a matter of fact that young gentleman did not find much gaiety in sitting and listening to grumblings over his own conduct and gloomy prophecies as to the future of the agricultural interests of the country; so that the old man generally sat there alone, nor had he ever been known to ask any one to keep him company. Indeed, he was supposed to be busy. This was the time for the review of the day's doings, for plans for the morrow,

and so forth. And this solitary retirement to the great and gaunt kitchen (which, nevertheless, was clean and warm enough) he had practised as a rite for over thirty years.

'My dear,' said he to Sabina, 'do you object to the smell of tobacco?'

'I like it,' was the plain answer.

'Yes, they all say that——'

'Oh, but I do—and it's very well I do, for sometimes I get a good dose of it.'

'Then you won't mind giving me a little of your company? My smoking-room is a plain one—the kitchen—there's always a fire, you see, and we don't annoy anybody. Where's your husband?'

'I think he has gone back to Jakes again, sir, to see about some dogs.'

'Come along, then, my dear,' said he, and when she promptly rose, he took her hand and placed it within his arm, and marched her away. 'It isn't a gilded smoking saloon, but it's snug. And I've such a story to tell you about an elopement. I had a hand in it myself, too, that I had, though it wasn't me the young lady was running away with. Faith, that was an act of friendship, wasn't it? To run away with a young lady on behalf of somebody else, and scarcely a man of the family less than a six-footer! But we did it, we did it, ay, and she got safe away, and over the Border both of them were before the people chasing

them had got to Carlisle. Come along, my dear, and sit down by the fire; it's a long story to tell. But there was some fun in those days.'

Fred Foster came in by and by.

'Where's Sabie?' he asked of his mother, who was quietly knitting in the little drawing-room.

'She has gone to sit with your father,' was the answer, and the old lady smiled a little.

'What! You don't mean in the kitchen?' he exclaimed, for such a thing had never been heard of before.

'Yes, indeed. He asked her, and she went at once.'

'Well, upon my soul! What's the matter with the old gentleman?'

Mrs. Foster looked up. 'It's very early in your married life to show jealousy, isn't it? But you'd better take care.' And then she added, 'Ah well, she is a dear. And this is what I think, Fred, that nothing luckier ever happened to you than your falling off that bicycle.'

If there was anybody jealous it was not Fred Foster. It was the old man who was determined to monopolise Sabina; and resented the slightest interference on the part of his son. The next morning, when Mr. Fred was buttoning on his gaiters in the hall, he called in to the breakfast room, 'Mother, we shall be shooting over Crookfield to-day; will you bring Sabie along for a while? Or will you send Tom to show her the road?'

But it was the old man who answered, and that sharply

too. 'Nothing of the kind. What! Dawdling along muddy hedgerows or crossing wet turnip-fields!' Then the voice became less gruff. 'No, no, my dear, we've something better for you than that. Just to think that you've never seen Hampden House, and the splendid avenue of Spanish chestnuts, and the relics, and all. Why, I'll show you the very spot where they tried to levy the ship-money. Yes, yes, my dear, it's a beautiful country. I'll drive you myself; and then we'll go on to Wendover, and maybe pick up a bit of lace for you—local industries, you know—local industries must be encouraged.'

And so Mr. Fred went away with the keeper and the dogs; while Sabina by and by found herself seated next the old gentleman in front of the wagonette, and leisurely driving along a pleasant highway on this clear and fresh September morning. She was in excellent spirits, and ready to be pleased with everything she saw. She even took good-naturedly the grumblings and growlings that greeted the slightest reference to her husband.

'But you may be of his way of thinking too,' he said, and he sharply glanced at her.

'How, sir?'

'Oh well,' he said, softening a little, 'it might be more natural in you, yes, yes; I should not be surprised if you thought our life in this quiet place rather monotonous and dull. You are accustomed to the gay life of a big town—balls and parties.'

'Indeed, no,' Sabina said simply; 'that was never my way of living at all.'

'But look at him,' the old gentleman said angrily. 'Look at him—a Buckinghamshire lad—born and bred in this very valley—but nothing here is good enough for him; he must be off and away, living like a lord, and thinking of nothing but the different ways of spending money. There's Crookfield—the very place he is off to this morning. Mullein's lease falls in next Michaelmas. The old man's wife died last year; his sons are doing very well in Texas; he's going out to them; and so the farm falls on my hands. There's a fine old farmhouse—one of the prettiest places in the neighbourhood—where any young couple might make themselves comfortable and snug. But would my gentleman look at it? Oh no; spending money, not making it, is his trade; though goodness knows there's not much money coming nowadays to people who have farms to let—in this part of the world, at all events. There it is, you see—the farm coming on my hands—as fine a farm as any in the country standing empty—and him horse-racing, I suppose, and billiard-playing, and spending money.'

'But it is only natural for a young man to like amusement,' she said gently. 'And besides, sir, you should remember he has just turned over a new leaf. He is to be quite a reformed character when he goes back to London.'

'Why should he go back to London?'

She did not answer that question. But she understood

clearly enough the drift of these remarks; and that same evening she said to her husband, 'I suppose you know, Fred, what the old people would like us to do. They would like us to settle down here—in the farmhouse at Crookfield —so as to be near them.'

'Yes, I know very well,' said he. 'It's exceedingly kind of them; but I'm not going to bury myself alive just yet. And you—do you mean to tell me you could bear with another fortnight—well let's say a month—do you mean to tell me you could stand a month of the kind of life they live here?'

She looked at him in amazement.

'Why,' she said, 'I could live all my life this way, if I thought I had any right to do so. Could anything be more pleasant and peaceful and harmless—the garden, the driving, the seeing to the house?'

'It isn't wildly exciting,' he remarked.

'But you don't know how lazy I am naturally,' she answered. 'A fine day, a seat in the garden, and a book—what more could any one want? And I am sure kinder people never were born; oh yes, this kind of life would suit me very well. But I know I haven't earned the right to it. When we get back to London, and when you have a little time to come along with me, I will show you why I could not accept this quiet, pleasant life down here with anything like a good conscience. Perhaps some day——'

'Perhaps some day we will do Darby and Joan, you

mean?' he said, lightly. 'I know one Darby—in these here parts—who seems a good deal fonder of his daughter-in-law than of his own lawful wife.'

'And how awfully fond she is of you, Fred!'

'Yes,' he said, 'the Mater has spoiled me all the way through. That's what has made me the wreck I am.'

'The wretch, you mean.'

'It's all the same,' he said carelessly.

In the meantime there was nothing to be done beyond the getting through these holidays as pleasantly as might be; and she submitted with a gracious indolence to the little plans that these good people drew out for her; and very kind indeed they were to her; and very proud of her they seemed. It was during this period, moreover, that she saw her husband at his best. If there was one strong feature in his character, it was his passionate devotion to his mother; and this, that she had only guessed at from his talking, she now saw put in evidence, in a hundred pretty ways, from morning till night. Just about as clearly as most people, Sabina perceived her husband's peculiarities and defects; for she had a calm understanding, and she was not blinded by any wild romanticism. He was frivolous, careless, infirm of purpose; he was a little cynical and not a little selfish. But his affection for his mother, his admiration of her, his praises of her goodness, his faith in her counsels, his delight in her personal appearance—all these were beautiful things to look at or to listen to. If

old Mr. Foster would have Sabina go with him for a stroll along the autumn-tinted highways, the son was well content to follow behind with the pretty and gentle mother, teasing her sometimes, at others petting her, but ever and always her champion.

'I suppose it is rather a stupid thing,' he said to Sabina, 'for a man to be proud of his own mother; but then, you see, they don't often make them like that.'

'She has been very kind to me,' Sabina said rather wistfully; she had not enjoyed much of a mother's care.

On the morning of their leaving for London Fred Foster addressed the following remarks to his wife, during the process of heaving his things into his portmanteau: 'Well now, Sabie, you've done everything I asked of you, and done it thoroughly too. I thought you would have had a tougher job with the old man, but you've settled him; you've made a poor, wretched, gelatinous thing of him; he's just as silly about you as the Wygrams used to be. But look here, my dear,' he said, regarding her rather ruefully, 'I haven't seen any practical outcome of it. Here we are going back, and not a word has been said about any little friendly assistance to two young people starting life together.'

'Oh, Fred,' she remonstrated, 'don't talk about money! They have been goodness itself to us.'

'Yes, my dear child, but money insists on being talked about; it is a way it has got. I don't say we haven't

enough for present necessities; and those rooms in the Strand are not expensive, considering how handy they are; but still—one would have liked a trifling augmentation of income, so to speak; or even supposing that a little friendly cheque had been slipped into one's hand, I daresay one might have pocketed one's dignity. Or perhaps he doesn't believe in my playing good boy down here? Wants to see how our small establishment is going to work? Payment by results, eh?'

'Fred, don't talk like that!' she implored. 'Surely we have enough, if we are careful and economical.'

'Oh, I assure you I am not frightened about the future,' he said gaily. 'The success of your performance down here has quite reassured me. When you can do for such a tough old character as my father, you won't have much difficulty in bringing your own father to reason, if once you set your mind to it. We shall be all right, never fear.'

Old Mrs. Foster was crying a little when she embraced her daughter-in-law for the last time at Wycombe station.

'Dear child,' she said, 'I—I suppose you are doing right in going away from us, but—but remember there is always a home waiting for you when you choose. God bless you, my dear. I shall look forward to your coming home. I know you will come and comfort the last years of an old woman's life.'

Sabina was not a sentimental person; but this old lady had been very, very kind to her.

'Good-bye, mother,' she said, with a half-stifled sob in her throat; and after they had got away from the station she sat very silent in a corner of the carriage, not caring to show that her downcast lashes were wet.

CHAPTER XX

IN LONDON AGAIN

This was Janie Wygram who was making her way up a dusky and narrow little staircase in a house in the Strand, and wondering the while what had induced the newly-married pair to pitch their dwelling in the very centre of the great city's turmoil. Then she gained a landing; there was an open door before her; and the next moment this was no other than her beloved Sabie who had eagerly caught her by both hands, and drawn her into the light, and kissed her, and was smiling and laughing with gladness to see her again.

'And I know what you're thinking, Janie—that we've gone stark, staring mad to come and live in such a place. Oh, but you have no idea how convenient it is. I can pop down to Hungerford Pier in a couple of minutes—the Charity Organisation Society is quite close by—there's Charing Cross Station handy for Fred—and Waterloo not so far away.'

At the first mention of Fred Foster's name the rather bewildered Janie involuntarily looked around; and Sabina instantly understood that mute interrogation.

'Fred's gone down to Lillie Bridge,' she said lightly.

As plainly as possible Janie's little glance of surprise said, 'He has left you already—alone in London, too?' but she was a prudent lass, and held her peace; and Sabina (whether or not she had noticed that look of surprise) continued cheerfully enough: 'I suppose he'll find some friends there, for he's not coming back till the evening; and so I thought I would use the day for my own purposes. That is why I wrote to you, Janie dear. I want you to come and help me in getting a few things for the rooms. Comfortable little rooms, aren't they? And one need never be dull either: just look at this.'

She took her friend to the window; and showed her the busy, noisy thoroughfare, with its continual stream of passers-by; its shops and pavements and sandwich-men; its cabs and vans and omnibuses; its ceaseless movement and kaleidoscopic groupings.

'When I'm left a poor forlorn grass-widow,' Sabina said, 'I can always amuse myself here. But you know, Janie, I shan't have much time for moping. Come, shall we go and begin our purchases at once? I want to get a few pretty things, and some useful things as well, just to make the place trim and snug. Fred was no use in the way of advice; the only thing he could suggest was a cellaret.'

All this time Janie had been quite silent; but now she took Sabina's hand in hers, and regarded her with tender and earnest and wistful eyes, and said, 'Ah, you don't know,

Sabie—how glad I am—to find you so—so—so happy—and contented.'

'Why, you dear, anxious, silly creature,' Sabina answered good-humouredly, 'what did you expect? Did you expect to find me sitting with a dagger and a bowl of poison before me? Come along now, and we'll get our shopping done; and then we'll come back here to have a bit of lunch; and you will tell me all about my friends down in Chelsea.'

And so they set forth; and soon they were both engrossed in that important business. At the same time Janie could not fail to perceive that Sabina seemed determined to be scrupulously economical, and betrayed a quite new desire to have money's worth for her money. Formerly she had been distinctly free-handed—even to carelessness; but now questions of small savings were considered; and more than once she contented herself with a second-rate article, in spite of Janie's protests. On their way back to the rooms in the Strand she even made some little kind of apology.

'You see, Janie, if I am to have any margin at all to help my poor people down there, we must be very prudent in what we spend on ourselves. I daresay, in time, and with care, we may make a little nest-egg, just in case of emergency; but at present it is pretty much hand to mouth; and I know my father won't alter his resolution, whatever Fred may think. That hundred pounds my father gave me for the wedding outfit just made all the difference to us;

you know I spent as little as ever I could; and out of the balance I paid for all these things we have been buying; and I lent Fred twenty pounds this morning; and even now I have another five and twenty left. So you see when I come again to visit my friends down there I shan't have a quite empty purse.'

'You lent Mr. Foster twenty pounds this morning?' Janie was startled into saying.

'Oh well,' Sabina rejoined, with her usual good-nature, 'he chose to call it a loan. I don't suppose our united fortunes will be so great that we need keep an account between us. I suppose that trip to Cornwall rather impoverished him—the driving is so expensive there; when you get married, my dear child, don't you go to Cornwall.'

'How very business-like you have grown, Sabie!' her friend exclaimed—perhaps with a touch of disappointment.

'A married woman, my dear, has her responsibilities,' Sabina answered briskly, as they were ascending to the room. 'And the first of these at present is to decide what we shall send out for, for lunch. Better still—we'll ring for the landlady, and ask her advice.'

It was quite like old times for these two to be having a frugal little meal together; and of course there was a great deal to be talked over concerning the fortunes and condition of the poor people who had been temporarily under Janie's charge. Nor were other friends forgotten; and at last Sabina said, 'And what about Walter Lindsay?'

Janie looked up quickly. 'Why, surely you know he has gone to America?'

'Oh yes, I remember his speaking about it,' Sabina said.

'His speaking about it,' Janie repeated, with something of reproach in her tone; and then she added, with a bit of a sigh, 'Ah well, Sabie, I suppose it was not your fault that you did not care for him.'

'But I did care for him,' Sabina answered warmly; 'I cared for him very much indeed. He and I were always the best of friends. I hardly ever knew any one I liked more—why, how could it be otherwise?—he was so generous and manly and courteous in every way. And so pleasant in manner,—I tell you, I liked him very, very much indeed.'

'He loved you, Sabie.'

Sabina hesitated for a moment, not knowing which way to take this.

'You should not say such things,' she said quietly.

'There's no harm in saying it now,' was the rejoinder.

'There would be harm if it were true,' Sabina said quickly. 'And I knew that you had some fancy of the kind, from the way you kept on talking about him. You mistook the very frankness of his friendship for something quite different.'

'Sabie, I'm telling the truth!' she cried. 'Why, he worshipped the very ground you trod on! There never was a man loved a woman more than he did you. He

thought of nothing else but you; night and day he was contriving to do you some little kindness—or even to keep himself in your remembrance. Loved you?—yes, I should think he did; you will never meet with a love like that again, if you live for a hundred years.'

'Janie, you forget!'

'No, I don't forget,' Janie said piteously, 'but I want to speak just this once. I think it is cruel—he goes away, without a word—well, that is just like him; up to the last he had no thought or wish but for your happiness; and now—when you talk of other people—you—you mention him just as an ordinary acquaintance, and you've half forgotten that he's gone away to America! I suppose he would prefer that; it was always his way; whatever was best for you—that was all he thought of. I went to tell him when you got engaged. I suppose I was rather put about. I had expected other things. But would he say a single word—except of kindness for you? No; he made me promise to remain your friend whatever happened; he made me promise to make the best of everything; he had nothing to say about himself, though I could guess well enough.'

'And so you think you are making the best of everything, Janie, by telling me all this?'

'I don't want him to be quite forgotten. I don't think it's fair. You would have remembered if the most ordinary acquaintance had gone away to America; and this man—

the noblest man that I have ever met with—he goes away from his own country—and with a broken heart, as I take it—and you scarcely remember——'

'Janie, don't make me angry,' Sabina said. 'I tell you I remembered well enough his intention of going to America; we talked of it on my wedding-day; and he was as cheerful then as you might be now, if you had only a little common sense. Come, come, put that folly out of your head; and let me know if you have heard anything about him since his arrival—I should be glad to hear of him now and again; I suppose he has friends over there?'

'Friends? yes, I should think so!' said Janie proudly. 'You should have seen the account of the dinner they gave him at one of the artists' clubs in New York. Father got the newspaper, but I don't know who sent it; and they said such fine things about him, and spoke of his making America his home. But I know better than that,' Janie continued, with an air of authority—'I know better than that. He meant it one time, no doubt; and he meant to sell his house and studio; and he asked me to go up one afternoon and help him to pick out keepsakes for the people we knew before he sold everything off. Well, we were getting through with that—and we have all of us got something to remember him by—father and mother and all of us—when he came to the Chippendale cabinet in the corner of the studio. He did not think I saw him, but I did; he took out the cup of rock-crystal

with the stones round it—you once drank out of that cup, Sabie——'

A slight flush came over Sabina's forehead.

'It was a piece of nonsense; I should have thought nothing of it only that your mother mentioned it afterwards.'

'Well, he looked at it a long time; and then he put it back; and then he turned to me. "Do you remember the night Sabina came here to supper?" he said—for I had asked him to call you Sabina during these last few days, when we were talking a little about you. "Of course I do," I said. "Do you remember how pretty she looked when she was up at the corner of the table—the yellow *fichu* of lace round her neck, and the bunch of forget-me-nots in front? She was very kind to me that night. And do you remember her coming along through the garden, like a pale, beautiful ghost; and her surprise at finding the studio so well lit up? That is where she sat—on the sofa there—while they were singing 'Shepherds, have you seen my Flora pass this way?'—you remember all that evening, Miss Janie?" As if I were likely to forget it! "Well," he says, "it's no use. I meant to sell this place, and go to America for good. I'm going to America, that's all right; but so help me God, so long as I have a shilling left, I will never allow a stranger to come in and take possession of this house!" And that is how it stands at this moment; and yet—yet—you say that man was not in love with you!'

'Janie,' Sabina said, 'you talk to me as if you had some-

thing to reproach me with—as if I had done Walter Lindsay a great wrong. Well, you know Walter Lindsay. But so do I; and I think I know him well enough to make sure he never meant you to speak to me like that.'

This was a deadly home-thrust; and for a second poor Janie became rather pale, and bit her lip.

'You may say anything you like against me, Sabie; I am quite content when I see you begin to appreciate Walter Lindsay a little.'

That was all that was said on this subject just then, for lunch was over now; and when Sabina asked Janie what they ought to do that afternoon (Mr. Fred not returning till seven), and when Janie besought her to go down and see the old people in Kensington Square, she most cheerfully consented. They spent the afternoon partly in Kensington Square and partly in certain neighbourhoods to the south of that, looking up a few old friends and acquaintances; and then, when Sabina had to return to the Strand, Janie made the voyage with her from Chelsea Pier to Hungerford, but could not be induced to go farther than that. Some other time, she said, she would call and see Mr. Foster and Sabina together.

As it chanced, if she had accompanied Sabina home to those rooms, she would have found Fred Foster in a remarkably good humour.

'Ain't we smart!' said he, as he came in (Sabina had preceded him by but a few minutes). 'Now, I do call this

uncommonly neat and snug for the very middle of London. Oh, Janie helped you, did she? Give her my love when you see her: she's not particularly beautiful, but I consider those people were awfully good to you. Now, Dame Durden, what's the programme for this evening? To begin with, some dinner. The strong point of this arrangement is that we are not dependent on cooks or butlers or anybody who may get drunk and break things; you wander out into the world of London and dine where you please—the best of food and the best of wines, if you only know where to go; no bother. You can entertain your friends, too, when fortune smiles on you. So off you go and make yourself gorgeous, and we'll try the Cri.'

'The what?' she asked.

'The Criterion. No; let me see; we'll go to the Café Royal; there I may have a cigar after dinner. Look alive, for I'm desperately hungry.'

They went to that restaurant; and Mr. Fred showed considerable experience and skill in ordering their little banquet, with its appropriate wines. Sabina rather took him to task for his extravagance, but he said lightly: 'Oh, you let me alone. I've had a little bit of luck to-day. Well, I don't consider it luck, as I told you before—I consider it bare justice; it's only getting a little of my property back. Don't you make any mistake—the breast of a partridge and a glass of Pommard were specially invented by a beneficent Providence to go together—don't be a fool,

but do as you're bid. I tell you I'm going to look after you, and see you through this turmoil they call life.'

He was quite merry, indeed, and told her many facetious stories about the two or three companions he had run against during the day. Indeed, so lightly did the time pass, that it was after nine o'clock before he had finished his cigar and was ready to leave.

'I had intended taking you to the theatre,' he said, as he called for his bill, 'but that's the worst about play-going in London now; the theatres are too popular. You are never sure of a decent seat, unless you solemnly make up your mind a long time before—as if you were going to be married, or hanged, or something. Then they don't let you smoke. And besides, you've got to rush away in the middle of your dinner, just when one's inner consciousness feels the want of repose. Now, the music-halls don't give you the highest form of intellectual entertainment—I admit that. It isn't Shakspere. But, mind you, there's something uncommonly handy in your being able to drop in at any time; always something going on; a cigar or a drink when you want it, or an evening-paper to vary the thing. Look here, what do you say to driving up to the Oxford for an hour?'

'The Oxford?' she repeated inquiringly.

'Yes; it's a music-hall, don't you know? Oh well, it isn't high culture, as I admit; but it's a way of passing an

hour; and then you wouldn't meet anybody—I mean, we should get a private box. No one would know that you were there, and sometimes there's very good singing.'

'If you don't mind,' she said, 'I think I would as soon go back to our rooms, and see how all our new finery looks.'

'Oh, very well,' he said contentedly; and so they went downstairs and got into a hansom and were driven home.

Sabina took to planning and arranging and stitching where that was wanted; he applied himself to Dufton's excellent treatise on 'Practical Billiards,' but soon fell asleep. When he awoke it was half-past eleven, and then he proceeded to mix for himself a little spirits and water as an adjunct to his final cigar.

CHAPTER XXI

SOME NEW ACQUAINTANCES

Now there had been a clear understanding, if no formal compact, between these two, that their life after marriage was to be in a manner a combination of their separate lives before it. He was to be at her right hand in all her various duties; she was to reward herself occasionally by a little participation in his amusements. He had talked her over into considering this a very sensible and practicable scheme; and on the one or two occasions when he was allowed to accompany her on her errands of mercy and help, his good-humour, his shrewd acquaintance with the world's ways, and his vivacious society, all came in very well. Unfortunately for this ideal copartnership, however, when they returned to London it so happened that the Cesarewitch and Cambridgeshire handicaps had just been published, and he was much interested in the discussion of these imposts, and he was away a good deal among acquaintances whom he did not care to introduce to his wife, because their conversation was not in the least likely to interest her. Then came the Doncaster September Meeting. But when he had spoken

of Sabina's giving herself a little holiday relaxation now and again, he had never thought of proposing to her a rough-and-tumble journey down to Yorkshire and back. He had thought of a sunny afternoon at Lord's, looking on at a cricket match; or a trip down the river in the steamer of the Royal Thames Yacht Club; or the Oaks, perhaps, or Ascot, or Goodwood—something pretty and lively and socially amusing; not this business-like meeting in the north. At the same time he considered it prudent, and even kind, to break the news of his going in an artful and diplomatic manner.

'Dame Durden,' said he, 'you're a young and innocent thing; I wish you'd pray for the success of Squire Tipton.'

'That's a horse, I suppose?' she said, looking up from her books—for she now kept minute accounts of her expenditure.

'I should say so, and a very good horse too. He's in for the Yorkshire Handicap on Tuesday; and seeing that he ran second for last year's St. Leger, and that he is as fit as a fiddle, according to all accounts, I think he'll do the trick. That's Tuesday afternoon. I suppose I ought to go down Monday night; there's a train arriving about nine. Then the Leger is Wednesday——'

'But where is all this?' she asked innocently.

'Why, Doncaster.' And then he added, 'It wouldn't be worth your while, would it, to go all that way and back just for these few days?'

She hesitated; was it not for him to decide?

'Oh no, I'm sure it wouldn't!' he said instantly, interpreting her silence his own way. 'It isn't a ladies' meeting. I wouldn't advise you to go. A lot of fatigue; precious little amusement. You won't find the time hang heavily on your hands, will you, till I come back?'

'Indeed, no,' she said, with a smile. 'There's never a day long enough, it would seem.'

The truth was that she had now to gather up again all the threads of her charitable work that had been temporarily dropped; and his devotion to his own pursuits left her all the more time down there in Chelsea, in the company of the indefatigable Janie. Janie was not at all sorry that Mr. Foster did not put in an appearance. Why, it was quite like old times for her to find herself going about with her bosom friend; and there was always tea for them, when they wanted it, in Kensington Square; and Sabie, in Mrs. Wygram's eyes, was just as beautiful and gracious and bland and good-natured as ever, and quite as submissive to all the petting that could be bestowed on her. These good people did not seem to be altogether angry when they heard that Mr. Foster was going down to Doncaster, though of course they made the remark that it was pretty early for him to be leaving his young wife.

But before Fred Foster went to Doncaster there were a few little matters to be considered. On the Friday evening, when Sabina returned home, she found him pacing up and

down the little sitting-room in very evident disappointment.

'It's pretty hard,' he said. 'I suppose I must ask you to lend me a five-pound note——'

'But I will give it you,' she said promptly, and she went to her desk with a light heart. 'I'm sure there is not much use in talking of lending or borrowing as between you and me—whatever I have is yours, and welcome.'

'If you're in such a generous mood,' he said, rather thanklessly, 'you might make the fiver a tenner, if you can.'

'Well, I can,' she answered, 'but it won't leave me very much.'

'It's very absurd, all this,' he continued, in his grumbling way, and he scarcely regarded her counting out the money on the table. 'Of course I thought the old man was going to do something—especially after the fuss he made about you. I consider it very shabby. I don't care for professions of interest and affection that don't mean anything. Why, it was enough to lead any one into being careless—or, at least, hopeful—the way they both treated you; and they must know very well that a wedding trip costs something; and I'm sure they couldn't expect me to have saved up a fortune out of my allowance.'

'But surely, Fred, so long as we can live comfortably enough, I would not make the relationship too much of a mercenary one?' she said gently. 'I am sure I never thought their kindness to me meant money. And look how

well off we are as compared to many! It may be annoying to be in want of a few sovereigns now and again, but look at the comfort of knowing that our income, however small, is assured. There are the ten pounds; isn't it enough?'

'Yes it is—for the present: it is the whole situation that seems to me unbearable, and absurd also.'

'But if you have enough, what more would you have?' she asked—and she was inclined to laugh at this spoiled child. 'You know, I shall be having my little cheque coming along on the 22d.'

'Yes, the twelfth part of £150,' he said bitterly. 'Accurately divided, to the shilling. No, no; I tell you, it won't do, Sabie. There must be some alteration. We ought to begin as we mean to go on; and it is easier for you to deal with your people than for me with mine; for your father is a very rich man, with whom the money itself can be no object; and I am perfectly certain he would do the right thing—what he ought in natural fairness to do—if he was approached the right way.'

She glanced towards him, and then she lowered her eyes.

'Do you mean that—that I should ask?'

'Yes, certainly,' he said bluntly. 'The very least he can do is to give you the allowance you had before you were married. Surely there is as much need for it now as then! That is the very least you ought to ask for.'

A faint colour overspread her forehead.

'You don't know,' she said, in a rather low voice, 'what his manner was towards me when that matter was settled—and—how he spoke of you.'

'Oh, that I understand perfectly well,' he said, impatiently. 'Why, it's the common story. Of course people say nasty things when they don't like a marriage; and goodness knows he's welcome to call me all the names he can think of. But that's neither here nor there. We can't afford to take a little display of temper for more than it is worth. It's only on the stage that parents curse their disobedient daughter, and drive her forth, and keep impossible vows about never seeing her again. Blood is thicker than water, depend on it. I have no doubt your father was annoyed; I daresay I should have been annoyed if I had been in his place; and, mind, you had been leading him on to be annoyed. I don't understand it at all; you can manage everybody else you come across—why did you quarrel with him?'

'There was no quarrel that I know of,' Sabina said, simply, 'but we had different ways of looking at things, that is all. When I left the house it was on a quite friendly understanding.'

'Oh well, he has simmered down by this time. And really something must be done. Will you write to him?'

'Fred,' she said, with a touch of entreaty in her voice, 'if you only knew the things he said——'

'My dear creature, if you paid heed to the things that

are said about you, or thought about you, life would be intolerable! Let us get to something of more importance than that. And the immediate and actual thing is that it is impossible for us to go on in this hand-to-mouth way.'

And yet still she hesitated. Of course he could not know anything of her father's demeanour towards her during that interview—the cold exactitude of his phrases, his contemptuous references to the man who was about to become her husband. He could not understand how eager she had been that he would agree to her renouncing that allowance altogether; and with what a recurrent shame and mortification it was that she felt herself compelled, month by month, to receive money from such a source. And now—to sit down and write for more!

A happy idea struck her.

'Besides, it would be no use writing,' she said, 'for they are abroad at present.'

'Oh no, they're not,' he said, 'begging your pardon. Look at this.'

He handed her an evening paper, and showed her a paragraph in it—

'Sir Anthony and Lady Zembra have arrived in town from a protracted sojourn at Davos-Platz. They proceed next week on a visit to Dikeley Hall, Suffolk, the country residence of Isambard Zembra, Esq., of Red House, Campden Hill.'

Sabina recognised the style of the patient chronicler of

the house of Zembra—Miss Renshaw, the governess, that is to say—and knew that the information was likely to be correct.

'It is a capital opportunity,' he said, with a little facetiousness. 'They're coming back flushed with their holidays; they'll imagine you've been cooped up in London all the time; and surely they will take pity on honest poverty. Oh, don't you be afraid of pitching the supplication pretty strong. What is the writing of a letter? Ten minutes' work—with a substantial reward if you do it well enough. And you may depend on it, it won't be preserved as a record against you. Sir Anthony won't show that letter about; it will be torn up directly he has read it. Why, wouldn't his constituents like to be told that the rich Sir Anthony allowed his eldest daughter the princely revenue of £12 : 10s. a month; and that she had to write to him for more? A pretty story for the local journals; a pretty cry at the next election. No, no; you may make your prayer as pathetic as ever you like; that is one thing about himself that he won't have sent to the public press.'

Well, for some time she sat in silent consideration; while he lit a cigar and proceeded to scan the contents of the evening paper. And if the truth were known, it was not Fred Foster, nor any of his wants or wishes, that finally overcame her deep reluctance and induced her to write to her father. It was of a great many other people she was thinking—honest, well-meaning people she took

them to be, and industrious when they had the chance—who yet had fallen into untoward circumstances in the general fight of the world, and had come to look on her as their wisest counsellor and best and generous friend. The winter months would deal hardly with many of these poor folk. Scant food, scant firing, scant clothing would become the parents of illness; illness meant enforced idleness; it was those of them who were too proud to accept of parish relief who suffered the most, and needed the most skilful management, if they were to be helped at all. Then she thought of her own little store. Twenty-five pounds a month used to be abundance; but now that was cut down by one-half; moreover, there were a good many small incidental expenses connected with this modest establishment which she had hardly looked forward to, and which her husband did not seem to think it was his business to deal with. In point of fact, she had never yet received a farthing from him—though he had bought her presents, and would have bought her more, only that she protested against his extravagance. On the contrary, she had lent him from her small hoardings until (as she thought of certain families she knew) she was almost afraid to see what a pittance was left; and if there was really a chance that her father would listen? It was scarcely asking for herself. It was rather begging for her poor ones. And so in the end she consented to write.

And yet as she wrote she could not help remembering

her father's manner to her, and she was not very confident. Nor could she demean herself by making too piteous an appeal. No; she merely asked him to reconsider the arrangement he had made; and hoped that he would see his way to making her the same allowance that he had formerly made her, seeing that her marriage had not interfered at all, and was not likely to interfere, with those little charitable undertakings that used to have at least his tacit approval. And she trusted that his annoyance with her over the step she had taken would cease in time; she looked forward to that.

Sabina handed the letter to her husband, and he took it and read it.

'Well,' said he lightly, 'it's rather a business-like production, and there isn't much of the *ad misericordiam*, *in formâ pauperis* kind of thing in it; but I daresay it will do very well. The old gentleman is too much of a man of the world to continue a quarrel with his daughter over a hundred and fifty a year.'

He rose and got his hat and cane.

'Come along, Dame Durden,' he said, cheerfully. 'We'll post this letter so that he'll get it the first thing in the morning; and then we'll drive up to the Café Royal and have a bit of dinner.'

'Wouldn't it be much cheaper to have some little thing here?' she suggested—thinking of the lent sovereigns and her diminished store.

'Not for this negro minstrel. No. I may trust Mother Simmons as far as a boiled egg goes, or even a chop for lunch; but no further. Come along, I'm as hungry as a hawk.'

And very merry and cheerful he was as they went out, apparently taking it for granted that Sir Anthony would consent. Perhaps the borrowed sovereigns in his waistcoat pocket added to his high spirits; at all events, when the letter had been posted, he would have Sabina get into a hansom—though she was quite willing to walk; and when they had got up to the café, and taken their places, he proceeded to order a little dinner that seemed to her quite unnecessarily prodigal.

'The question now lies between Burgundy and champagne,' he observed. 'What do you say to that Bollinger we tried the other day?'

'I won't have any wine, thank you,' she answered.

'Why not?'

'I would rather not have any, thank you,' she said simply.

'Well, that is pretty hard on me,' he remarked, with rueful sincerity. 'For when we have a whole bottle, I get two-thirds of it; but when I order a pint, it is only a pint. Come, Sabie, change your mind—I want you to drink good luck to Squire Tipton.'

'Really I would rather have no wine,' she said.

'Then a pint it must be,' he said; and he ordered that —while she had some water.

They had just finished dinner, and Foster was pulling out his cigar-case, when two friends of his came along, and nodded to him as they passed the little table. The one was a middle-aged shortish man, spare of frame, with a keen, weather-tanned face, prominent blue eyes, and a carefully waxed moustache; the other a tall young man, with rather flabby, clean-shaven cheeks, very light hair, vacant eyes, and listless demeanour. Both were in evening dress, their light overcoats being over their arm.

'Wait a minute, Raby,' Foster called after them, and they both turned; 'I want to introduce you to my wife—Captain Raby—Mr. Russell——'

The tall apathetic young man merely bowed; but Captain Raby said, 'Proud to have the honour of making your acquaintance, Mrs. Foster,' and stared at her so curiously that she dropped her eyes.

'I say, what are you after to-night?' Foster continued, regarding them both. 'Won't you come down and smoke a cigar in my diggings—in the Strand, don't you know?'

The shorter of the two gentlemen was still looking at Sabina—examining her almost.

'Delighted, I am sure,' he said, 'if Mrs. Foster will permit.'

'Oh, she doesn't mind a cigar or two,' Fred Foster put in instantly. 'Come along. We'll go down in two hansoms. Tell your man to follow us—we will show you where to pull up.'

In the cab Sabina said to him, 'Who are these two?'

'The little man is Captain Raby—a very good sort of fellow—and as sharp as a needle. He manages all Lord Tynemouth's turf affairs for him.'

'I don't like him,' she said.

'Why, you haven't spoken a word to him yet! Oh yes, he's a very good sort of fellow—and one worth knowing.'

'And the other?'

'Russell? Don't you know Russell and Schroeder in Oxford Street? Of course you do. Not that he has anything to do with the business: it's his happy occupation to spend the money that has been made in it.'

'He seems a soft-looking youth,' was Sabina's sole comment.

'Johnny Russell,' answered her husband, significantly, 'is a very valuable young man—an extremely valuable young man.'

When they had all arrived at the rooms in the Strand, Fred Foster became his own butler; and produced cigars, soda water, brandy, and also a pack of cards; while Captain Raby devoted himself to Sabina, staring at her as he spoke. It was sixpenny 'Nap' they were going to play; and nothing would do but that Sabina should join in; and she, being a good-natured kind of creature, consented; though in her manner there was a trifle more reserve than usually appeared there when she joined a friendly little

game at the Wygrams' of an evening. Captain Raby appeared to care very little about the cards; he played mechanically and indifferently; and was mostly concerned in chatting across the table to Sabina—his talk chiefly consisting of little sarcastic comments about her husband and his ways and doings. Moreover, whenever she lifted her eyes—as sometimes she did in a puzzled kind of fashion, for she understood the game but slightly, and was oftentimes uncertain as to what she should do—invariably she found his eyes regarding her, and that in a curiously familiar way. He said nothing to offend; but his manner was unpleasant; and Sabina gradually withdrew herself from any conversation, attending to the cards in a perfunctory way, and anxious only to escape. At last, when the mild youth had boldly gone Nap, and got it too, Captain Raby said, 'I'll tell you what we'll do now. Three Nap is as good as any. Now I don't think Mrs. Foster is having a fair chance. You haven't played much, have you, Mrs. Foster? Well, now, I will come and sit beside you and play your hand for you—give you advice, anyway—I would just as soon look on—and we'll see if we can't mend matters a little.'

He rose; but Sabina refused his offer on the ground that she wished to withdraw from the game anyway. She had a slight headache; she would rather leave them to themselves. There was a little bit of a scrimmage after this; the pale-faced youth timidly pleading with her to

remain; Fred Foster laughing at her for being a bad loser; Captain Raby almost insisting that she and he together should play the same hand, and rout their foes. Sabina gently persisted, and with a little dignity too; she withdrew from the table to an arm-chair, and took a book; and then they continued the game by themselves, with the addition of a half-a-crown pool to increase the attraction.

They played late; Sabina wondering the while when they would go. And even after they had risen from the cards, Captain Raby would light another cigar, and would come and talk to Sabina in his gallant way, and promise to see that her husband got into no mischief down at Doncaster. Immediately they had gone, Fred Foster said to her, 'Well, Madam Dignity, what offended you to-night?'

'Oh, nothing in particular,' she said; and then she looked up. 'What is that Captain Raby a captain in?'

'He was in the militia, I believe.'

'I don't think he's a gentleman,' she said.

'Well, I like that,' Foster said, with a laugh. 'He's Lord Tynemouth's brother-in-law, at any rate.'

She made no reply to this.

'Perhaps you preferred the draper?' he asked.

'Mr. Russell? Yes, I preferred his manner very much. And I suppose he is no more feeble and foolish than other brainless young men of the same type.'

'Well, we're in a very hypercritical vein this evening!' he said, looking at her with some surprise. 'You'll have

to learn, my dear, that the world is made up of all sorts; and one can't have one's friends all turned out regulation pattern. I suppose there are some Admirable Crichtons somewhere; but they don't abound in the Strand; and they won't play whist to lighten the journey down to Doncaster. The one isn't a gentleman, and the other is a fool? Well, fool or no fool, he managed to rob me of three golden sovereigns this evening that I shall have to get back from him somehow or other next week. Three golden sovereigns to an infant like that! No matter; we'll put it straight next week, I have no doubt. So you go away to bed now; and don't forget to pray that your father may arise in a blessed and heavenly temper to-morrow morning.'

CHAPTER XXII

WAYS AND MEANS

The answer of Sir Anthony Zembra to his daughter's reluctant petition arrived just as she and her husband were going out for the evening. Mr. Foster had been presented with a couple of stalls at one of the theatres in the Strand; so he proposed that they should dine at a restaurant and go to the play afterwards. But the appearance of this important letter drove both dinner and theatre out of Fred Foster's head.

'Well,' said he with affected indifference, as she glanced over the contents, 'does Jupiter nod favourably, or is this another thunderbolt?'

Sabina did not answer; her face had flushed suddenly—with anger or indignation; and she folded the letter again quickly.

'Let me see it.'

He held out his hand; she withdrew an inch or two.

'No,' she said, 'you need not read it. He refuses. I thought he would—so I suppose it doesn't much matter.'

'And he says something about me that I am not to

look at? Do you think I am a child or a fool? Let's see it.'

He took the letter from her and opened it, and read as follows :—

'DEAR SABINA—I think you are aware that I never waste words. I told you that you were free to go your own way, and order your life as you thought best; and I named the sum I was willing to allow for your own personal maintenance. I must decline to increase that sum in order to enable you to support a lot of paupers—including your husband.—Yours truly, ANTHONY ZEMBRA.'

He laughed aloud; but it was a rueful kind of laugh.

'Pretty mad, isn't he? I thought the old gentleman would have become a little reasonable by now. Well, we'll have to wait—as best we can.'

It was the refusal of the money that chiefly concerned him; the insult levelled at himself he did not seem to mind in the least. Indeed, he threw the letter carelessly on to the table; took up his hat, gloves, and cane again; and then, when he was ready, he held open the door to let Sabina pass out.

'We'll have to hurry over this banquet,' said he lightly, 'if you want to see the beginning of the piece.'

All the same he was rather silent during dinner; and he did not seem to care much for the little comedy they went to see thereafter. When they got back to their rooms,

and he had lit a cigar, and ensconced himself in a low easy-chair, he revealed what he had been thinking of all the evening by his first ejaculation.

'It is a confounded nuisance,' he said impatiently.

'Fred,' said she, 'don't you think we might manage to live a little more economically than we do, and so mend matters that way? Dining at restaurants is so expensive; if you didn't mind being content with what they can do for us here, you might have your own wine sent in, and that would make a great difference. And you know you are so dreadfully extravagant about cabs—or careless, rather, I should say.'

'Oh, it's no use talking like that,' he interrupted. 'Saving twopence-farthing here or there won't put matters straight. What I want to know is what income we can definitely calculate on.'

'But you know,' she said.

'What? what we have at present? Oh no, no; that won't do at all; that I look on as provisional; it was always understood to be so. Of course we can't go on like this.'

Well, she did not answer; though she might have reminded him of her repeated warnings that Sir Anthony would prove implacable, of which his cheerful optimism would take no heed. Nor did she further insist on their cutting their coat according to such cloth as they had in the meantime; nor did she venture to suggest that he might

turn his attention to some pursuit more settled and profitable than playing billiard matches and backing horses. For these considerations were obvious; and no man likes to be preached at.

'I am afraid,' said he, gloomily staring at his outstretched legs and the tips of his patent-leather boots, 'you've only made matters worse by writing that letter.'

'I am sure I did not wish to write it,' she said gently.

'No, of course not. I don't suppose you did. But people have often to do what they have no wish to do; and the best way then is to do it with as good a grace as possible. I think you might have made that letter a little more complaisant. There was no use showing you did it unwillingly—of course he would say, "Oh, this is a business communication; and I'll answer it as such."'

Sabina sat silent. It was the first time he had found fault with her. And she did not remind him that he had seen the letter before it was sent, and that, if it did not please him, he might have remonstrated then.

Nor was he inclined to be much more cheerful on the following morning, as he stood at the window and idly thrummed on the pane. Indeed the Strand early on a Sunday morning is not a sight to raise any one's spirits, even when it is flooded with London's sickly sunshine. It is like a city of the dead. The shops are shut; the buildings deserted; the pavements empty; at long intervals a solitary four-wheeler—looking somehow as if it had been out all

night, and got lost, and was groping its way slowly home—comes stealthily along the hushed wooden highway, the footfalls of the horse sounding faint and distant. Mr. Fred Foster turned from that depressing spectacle, and took to the sporting papers he had purchased the night before.

And then he threw these aside.

'Look here, Sabie, something must be done. That letter has only made matters worse. Your father seems more determined in his unreasonableness than ever; if you let him go on like that, it will become confirmed, and then good-bye to everybody's expectations. The mischief done by that letter must be undone somehow; and at once. Of course it isn't about any immediate and temporary thing that I am thinking—I daresay one could always put one's hand on a few sovereigns if there was need—it's the long future that I'm looking to; and something must be done. And it isn't merely doubling your allowance that has to be thought of; an additional twelve pound ten a month isn't a great thing; it's his attitude towards you. Your father is a very rich man; you are his eldest daughter; the only one married; it's absurd that he shouldn't do something substantial and handsome for you. Why, how would he like it to be known?'

'I don't think he would care,' said Sabina, who knew her father a good deal better than Mr. Fred Foster did.

'I say it is quite preposterous,' he continued, impatiently. 'You may ask why I don't appeal to my own people. But

that's different. They're in the right mood; they'll do the right thing by and by. I don't want to press them just at present. My father is inclined to be cautious, and suspicious even; but the Mater's always on my side; they'll be all right by and by. But this other affair is very serious, looking to the future. And if you ask me, I think there's only one thing to be done.'

'What, then?' she asked; though this talk about money rather depressed her—she hardly knew why.

'You should go and see him—this very day.'

She started slightly.

'Yes,' he continued boldly. 'That's the proper way. Anybody can answer a letter; a letter can't make an appeal; a letter hasn't to be faced. Here you have such a chance—your father in town—you would be sure of seeing him in the afternoon—and then if you went and told him how you were situated, and put the thing fairly and properly to him, and were civil to him, how could he refuse?'

She was looking at him—with a strange, startled look.

'Fred,' she said slowly, 'would you have me go and ask money from my father after what he called you in that letter?'

He saw the surprise in her face, and the reproach too; perhaps it was the consciousness that these were not uncalled for that made him all the more impatient, and even vexed and angry.

'Oh, it's all very well for you to have romantic notions,' he said bluntly, 'but you'll find as you live longer in the

world that they won't wash. Do you think I care what your father thinks about me? Not one bit. He may call me a hundred names in a day if he likes. Would you like me to tell you what I think about him? Perhaps you wouldn't. I daresay he wouldn't care either. But what's that got to do with giving him the opportunity of doing the right thing by his own daughter? I don't ask for his money. It's as much your affair as mine. I want to give him the chance of acting like a reasonable human being; and it isn't to-morrow or next day that I'm thinking about, but of a very long future, as I say.'

Sabina's eyes were downcast now; her face was somewhat pale.

'There are some women who are well off,' she said; 'they can earn their own living without taking a penny from any one. I wish I could do that. I would work hard enough.'

'There you are with your romantics again,' he complained. 'What would you like to do? Stitch shirts at ninepence a day? Or stand behind the counter in a telegraph-office?'

The maidservant came in with breakfast, so that conversation had to cease. But he knew that he had spoken with unnecessary harshness; and when breakfast was over, and he had taken up one of the sporting journals, he began to excuse himself a little.

'I only want you to exercise a little common sense,

Sabie,' he said. 'People must put their pride in their pocket at times. Of course a noble self-respect is a very fine thing; and if I were a duke, with £100,000 a year, I should worship myself like a little god, and expect everybody else to do the same. But poor folk like you and me, my dear, can't afford to have more than an ordinary, decent, Christian-like allowance of pride—no, we shouldn't have any if we are to be like Christians—we should practise humility; and if people call us ugly names we should say that probably we deserve them. Bless you, what harm can the calling of names do you? Besides, he said nothing of the kind to you; I was the happy recipient——'

'Do you think I make any difference of that kind?' she said quickly; and there was no humility at all, but a wounded and indignant pride in the expression of the sensitive mouth and the beautiful clear eyes. 'No, when I read that, it was as if—as if he had struck me!'

'Oh,' said he coolly, 'you must cultivate a little wholesome indifference. You'll never get through the world at all if you are so thin-skinned. Besides, if you consider he has done you an injury, or me, or both of us, don't you think it would only be magnanimous to give him the chance of atoning?'

'You would have me ask for money—after that insult?'

He did not answer; for he did not wish to get angry again; so he returned to his newspaper; and Sabina took

up a book and read till it was time to go to church. She went to church alone.

When she returned they had lunch together; and Foster was again in a somewhat fretful mood.

'I don't see why you should look at it in that way,' he said, just as if the subject had never been dropped. 'The only thing that pride does is to keep up family quarrels. It's absurd that your father and you should be on such terms; and how is the situation to be altered so long as you have these high-flying notions? Any other girl would go to her father and make it up in five minutes. Can't you look at it that way? Put the money out of the question. Here is a Sunday; your father will be at home this afternoon; why not go and make up a family quarrel?'

'Fred,' she said—and the distress that was in her face was a piteous thing to see—'don't ask me to go!'

'Then you give the whole thing up?' he asked.

'You see what he says,' she pleaded. 'Could anything be more distinct?'

'Oh, very well—I suppose it's all right.'

After lunch he took up his hat and cane, and said to her, 'I'm going along to see Dick Raby, to fix about the train to Doncaster to-morrow. I suppose one must try to pick up a few sovereigns somehow.'

'Shall I wait till you come back?' she asked.

'Oh no; not if you have anything to do. Most likely I shan't be back till about seven.'

When he had gone she sat for some little time pondering over these things. And perhaps there was some cause for his vexation? Perhaps she had not told him clearly enough what manner of man her father was, and warned him with sufficient distinctness that any resolve of his would be final? And perhaps, when he asked her to go and make a personal appeal to her father, he did not quite understand the humiliation that would involve? Men were less quick to perceive such things than women. If he had known what that interview must necessarily mean, surely he would not have asked her to go?

By and by—and still in a somewhat thoughtful mood—she put on her things, and went out, taking the underground railway down to Kensington. She had just turned into Kensington Square when she caught sight of Janie coming away from the house; and it was very grateful to her (for she was a little depressed somehow) to notice the quiet look of pleasure that instantly appeared in Janie's wistful eyes.

'Oh, Sabie, this is so kind of you! All the morning I kept saying to myself, "I wonder if Sabie will come this afternoon?"'

'And that is why you left the house?' Sabina said with a smile.

'Oh, but I meant to be back in time. I did not expect you so early.'

'And where are you off to?'

'Will you go with me, Sabie?' she said eagerly. 'I was going up to Walter Lindsay's studio. I had a letter from him yesterday morning, and he reminded me that I offered to go up from time to time and see that everything was going on all right. Won't you come? It will be a nice walk. And mother's lying down just now. We'll have tea when we come back.'

And so Janie found herself once more walking along Kensington High Street with her beloved Sabie; and up the Campden Hill Road; and over to Notting Hill; and proud and pleased she was; and on this occasion (as on many a former one) all the talk was of Walter Lindsay.

'And where is Mr. Lindsay now?' Sabina asked, to humour her.

'Still in New York. He is having a caravan built for himself—a studio on wheels, you know—and when that is quite ready, he is going away—oh, I don't know how far. But he is to send me his address from time to time—just in case there should be any news for him; and you know the news he will look for; it's news about you, Sabie.'

'Don't talk nonsense,' Sabina said, but not ill-naturedly. 'What news could he want to hear about me?'

'That you are well and happy—I think that's all he would want to hear.'

'You are a very sentimental young woman, Janie, and imagine things,' Sabina said. 'Now I want you to talk

about something practical. You remember taking me into a place in Oxford Street—an art-furniture place——'

'Maragliano's?'

'Yes. You remember the hand-painted china we saw—the dessert-service, and so on; now do they pay well for that kind of work?—would it be worth while for any one to try and get some of it to do?'

'I know Mr. Hutton, the manager; I will ask him,' said Janie, never doubting that this was but another of Sabina's numerous schemes for benefiting somebody or other.

'I suppose they have inferior sets,' Sabina continued, 'where very high artistic skill would not be necessary. I used to draw and paint a little, years ago. I could copy things anyway. There were some flowers on vases that I think I could do.'

'You?' said Janie, in amazement. 'You yourself, Sabie? What do you want to do that kind of thing for?'

'Well, the truth is,' she answered, 'I'm afraid that Fred and I will have to pinch a little. We shan't be very well off, you know; and I was wondering if I could help; I might fill in a little time that way, at night, if I were clever enough. I wonder if it is difficult.'

'Filling in time?—yes, you are so idle! And you would work at night, too, when you get home dead tired! What next, Sabie?' her friend said indignantly. And then she added, with a sharp look, 'Whose scheme is that?'

'My own, of course. Will you ask Mr. Hutton if he will let me have one or two simple things? I don't expect much—there are too many unemployed young women looking out for work of that kind—but even if it was a little I should be glad.'

'I know this,' said Janie boldly—and as they were come to the gate of the house, she paused there for a moment, and regarded Sabina without fear—'I know this, Sabie, that I could get you one customer who would buy all that you could paint, even if he had to lock it up in chests and never see it again; yes, and pay you like a king for it, even if he had to sell house and land and pictures and everything. Ah, you don't know what he said to mother—that time of the supper in this very house—or did I tell you?—about the falcon?—and how he envied the Florentine young gentleman who had the chance of sacrificing his falcon for the sake of his sweetheart?'

'But what has that to do with me?' Sabina said.

'You don't know, then, that that supper was given all in your honour; and that everything he could get in England was got for you; and I think he was quite sorry he wasn't poor, that he might make some real sacrifice for you? Ah well, Sabie, I will say this for you—you made him very happy that one evening.'

'You are incorrigible,' Sabina said good-humouredly. 'Why, you may depend on it that at this very minute your hero is making love to one of those American girls—they're

pretty enough, to judge by those of them who come over here.'

Janie would not answer; she rang the bell, and they were admitted. The housekeeper was very civil; offered them tea; was pleased to hear news of Mr. Lindsay; and reported the small incidents that had happened since he left. Then Janie got the key of the studio; and she and Sabina passed through the little garden, opened the heavy door, and entered the gaunt, strange-looking, musty-smelling place.

'He was right—it wants a little airing occasionally. Different from the night that you were here, Sabie, isn't it? See, there is the Chippendale cabinet in the corner; but you won't find in it the rock-crystal cup you drank out of—oh no, that's away in safety with his other valuables. Maybe he has taken it to America with him.'

'Do you know, Janie,' Sabina said, out of pure mischief, 'I am beginning to believe that you are in love with Mr. Lindsay yourself.'

'Don't say that, Sabie, even in joke. Besides——'

She hesitated. But was not this a rare opportunity for revealing a great secret.

'Besides what?'

Janie's pale face flushed, and the wistful eyes were a trifle beseeching.

'There's some one else!' Sabina cried. 'So that's it? Oh, Janie, why did you never tell me? Or is it quite a new affair? Well, then, who is he?'

'Did you never guess, Sabie?'

'Never, never!'

'Not when you saw Philip Drexel coming about the house?'

Now this Philip Drexel was a young figure-painter, whose ambitious style and defiant mannerisms had attracted some little notice, though Sabina had paid no great heed to him. But now she was greatly interested, and would know all about the engagement, though Janie protested there was no such thing, but only an understanding, that was not to be made known to anybody as yet. And Sabina had abundant praises for the young painter; and would make Janie promise to bring him to the rooms in the Strand, so that she might better get to know him; and altogether was highly pleased.

'But you know, Sabie,' said the honest-minded Janie, with a demure smile, 'I'm not too proud about it. I don't think his approval of me is too much of a compliment. You know they've asked him to send in two or three pictures to the Grosvenor Gallery next year; and—and he came to mother and asked her if I would give him some sittings for one of them—"Mariana in the South" it is to be—and he said something about me being quite an ideal type for him. Well, I don't think it's too complimentary—do you, Sabie?—for you know he paints such dreadfully ugly women.'

'Oh, I don't think so at all,' Sabina said instantly.

'Why, I've heard people speak most highly of his pictures. And of course he'll make his Mariana ever so much prettier than any of the others.'

'Sabie, you can say such nice things!' the girl said; and gratitude was near bringing tears to her eyes; for she knew that she was not very beautiful.

Well, the promised visit had been paid to both house and studio; and they went back to Kensington Square, and had tea with the old people; and in due course Sabina returned to the lodging in the Strand. Mr. Foster, when he came in, announced that he would be going down to Doncaster by an early train the next day. He made further reference to the project of her seeking a personal interview with her father; though once or twice he threw out hints that he hoped the trip to Doncaster would repay him—otherwise things might be getting a little 'tight.' Sabina, on her part, made no reference to her vague fancy that she might earn something by painting on porcelain; indeed, if the scheme were practicable at all, she would have preferred sitting up at night to do the work, when no one knew.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT A MUSIC HALL

However, as it turned out, Fred Foster returned from his visit to Yorkshire in the most radiant good-humour; his Doncaster speculations had turned out very well indeed; and not only did he faithfully pay back to Sabina every farthing that he owed her, but also he promised that after settling-day she should have twenty-five pounds to be devoted entirely to her charitable enterprises. Nay, more; he said that, as he did not expect to be away from town again till the Newmarket Second October Meeting, he would go with her on her rounds, and see how she was getting along; and he thought he would begin by having a little serious conversation with a certain non-working man down Hammersmith way about whom she had told him, and who was neglecting his wife and family in a shameless fashion.

'Or don't you think that a thundering good licking would knock the laziness out of him?' he asked cheerfully.

'I don't know,' said Sabina. 'But I am afraid it would

not look well if I had to go to the police-court to bail out my husband. What would Mr. Bridge think of me? And, you know, he is very good to me. I can always have an officer of the court with me, if I want to make any inquiries——'

'Oh, I am going to be your officer of the court,' he said gaily, 'and we'll begin to-morrow morning. In the meantime we're going to have a little celebration of our good luck this evening. Captain Raby has gone up to the Bristol to order a bit of dinner—just the four of us, you know—Raby, and Johnny Russell, and you, and I——'

'Please leave me out, Fred,' she said at once.

'Why?'

'Oh well, I should simply be in the way. You don't want a woman at a man's dinner-party of that kind. It would look ridiculous. Besides, you will have your own affairs to talk over. I shall do very well here; I find no difficulty in passing the time.'

'Oh, nonsense!' he exclaimed. 'Why, the whole thing has been got up to please you. It was Raby's proposal, and I expressly accepted the invitation for you. Look ridiculous?—why, it will be in a private room; we shall be quite by ourselves. Come, Sabie, don't be a kill-joy just as things are looking a little brighter.'

'Oh, very well,' she said good-naturedly. 'But I believe you would have a merrier party without me.'

'Don't you think anything of the kind,' he said. 'You're

not one of the straitlaced ones. And if you knew how glad I shall be to have a bit of decent dinner—to take the Doncaster taste out of my mouth. Perhaps you yourself wouldn't like to live on ham sandwiches and pork pies and butter-scotch?'

Sabina did not answer this question; for she had to go and smarten herself up somewhat. Very much rather would she have stayed at home; but she was pleased to see her husband in such high spirits; and she certainly had no wish to play the part of kill-joy. Indeed, she made herself as neat as possible; she would do him credit.

Nor did Sabina's presence seem to act as any damper at the modest little festivities that took place at the Bristol Hotel. All three of her companions appeared to be highly pleased with the result of their Yorkshire trip; even the vacant-eyed Johnny Russell—whose flabby and clean-shaven face was a little more flushed than usual, ceased to be voiceless, and was nebulously anxious to interest Sabina in one or two topics not connected with the turf. It was Captain Raby who kept the coolest head; but to make up for that he seemed bent on encouraging Fred Foster's outbursts of gaiety; and, of course, as host, it was his duty to pass the wine.

'You don't know, Mrs. Foster,' said he, with that familiar stare that invariably caused Sabina to lower her eyes, 'you don't know what your husband did for us down

there in the north. He was quite a blessing to us. After this week he ought to be called The Infallible.'

'Why, that is the name of my paper!' Fred Foster cried at once. 'Didn't you know I was going to publish a racing newspaper? Just you wait and you'll see. And of course I'm going to run the business of sporting prophet as well—here, Johnny, lend me your pencil, and we'll get out the manifesto; we're all in it, you know, for I never desert my friends.'

The apathetic young man detached a massive gold pencil from his watch-guard and handed it over; and for some little time Mr. Foster was engaged in the throes of literary composition, while Captain Raby considerately endeavoured to amuse Sabina. At last the back of the *menu* was pretty well filled; and then Mr. Foster read out his address to the public:—

'Mr. FRED FOSTER, proprietor of *The Infallible* and sporting telegraphist. Mr. Foster may now confidently appeal to the racing public for their continued support, as his marvellous and repeated success beats all previous records (see my last year's Cesarewitch week, and the brilliant feat of placing the first, second, and third for the Two Thousand, Derby, and St. Leger). A special number of *The Infallible*, devoted to the Middle Park Plate, is now ready; and for the nominal sum of five shillings will be supplied to all applicants, along with subsequent issues to end of season. . . . FINALS. NEWMARKET FINALS.

Mr. Fred Foster, having just returned from a professional visit to the chief training centres, is prepared to give sound and reliable advice on all the great races yet to be run; but would especially advise his patrons to secure his final telegrams for the Newmarket Meeting at the trifling outlay of one sovereign for the week. Mr. Fred Foster is above the vulgar arts of the ordinary prophet; scorns to advertise himself by newspaper puffing; and obtains his information without chicanery. Address—Mr. Fred Foster, No. —, Strand, W.C.'

'There, now, how's that?' he asked, regarding the paper with some pride.

'I think "God save the Queen!" should come in at the end,' observed Mr. Russell.

'Let's have a drink over it anyway. Pass the champagne, Raby. And here's the health of Squire Tipton—may his shadow never grow less!'

They had lit their cigars by this time (with many apologies to Mrs. Foster), and then coffee came in, and liqueurs; and there was a period of comparative repose—Fred Foster sipping maraschino and occasionally hazarding a remark to Johnny Russell about the probable starters at Lichfield and Manchester; Mr. Russell listening in a vacuous silence, and also sipping maraschino; Captain Raby entirely devoting his conversation to Sabina, if that can be called conversation which was chiefly a series of stories, more or less discreditable, about very distinguished people. Mr. Fred Foster began to find this slow.

'Look here,' he said, 'we can't talk horses all the evening.'

'I quite agree with you,' said Captain Raby, instantly.

'I propose we go and get a private box at the ——,' said he, naming a well-known music hall. 'We can smoke just as well there; and there's always something going on. There are those children on the bicycles—very pretty that is. And Kate Tremayne—well, it's rather early for her yet, but she'll be on by and by—and she's always fun. What do you say?'

He addressed Captain Raby; that gentleman was regarding Sabina with a look in which there was a little affected surprise and amusement.

'Oh, that is not for me to decide,' said he, gravely. 'It is for Mrs. Foster to say whether she would like to go.'

It was a kind of a challenge. A hundred times would she rather have gone back home, and busied herself with her own affairs; but that half-scornful look of Captain Raby's had annoyed her; and she said at once, 'Of course I will go, Fred, if you want me to go with you. But wouldn't you rather go by yourselves?'

'Oh no, no,' the phlegmatic young man said, with unusual warmth.

'I'm afraid we can't get a domino and mask for you, Mrs. Foster,' said Captain Raby, smiling in his saturnine fashion. 'And yet they would be useful if they were

allowed. I don't think you would care to be seen at the ——'

Taking no heed of him, she calmly awaited her husband's decision; and he said forthwith, and rather impatiently, 'Of course you won't be seen at all! We'll put you in a corner of the box; there's a curtain—of course you won't be seen. And don't you believe all that's said against music halls by people who have never been near them. There's sometimes very good music. And anyway it passes an hour—and—and you can smoke—and—and Kate Tremayne—well, if she isn't funny enough for anything——'

'We shall have Mrs. Foster's opinion of Miss Tremayne by and by,' observed Captain Raby; and the tone in which he spoke more than ever determined Sabina that she would make the best of everything she saw or heard in that music hall, Miss Tremayne included.

And yet it was a hard task; for anything more contemptible—anything more insulting to the commonest intelligence—than the amusement provided in this place of entertainment it would be impossible to imagine. The mean knowingness, the swagger, the vulgar braggadocio with which the performers appealed to their audience, were a sorry thing to see and hear; and indeed Sabina, safely ensconced in the corner there, and looking abroad over that mass of young men and lads, and young women too, all drinking in this wretched stuff, was moved far more to pity than to any sort

of disdain. When the person on the stage—a big, overweighted, crapulous-looking creature he was, with a head like an unboiled haggis, in-knees, and an enormous paunch —sang his famous song of 'Englishmen—one to ten,' those white-faced, narrow-chested, gin-bemused boys took up the chorus with him—

> *'We've fought before; we'll fight again;*
> *We'll sweep the land; we'll sweep the main;*
> *We're Englishmen,*
> *And, one to ten,*
> *We'll stand and bid the world come on!'*

'Poor wretches,' Sabina said, half to herself, 'there's not much fighting stuff in them.'

However, there was little that was really offensive in this blatant pseudo-patriotism; it was during subsequent performances that Sabina's face fell; and she began bitterly to regret having, from a passing wish to defend her husband, ever come to such a place at all. Moreover, he had left her now. Just as Miss Rosa Lee had finished her favourite song of 'Tandem Tommy' (Miss Lee appeared in a Newmarket coat of yellow satin, with enormous brass buttons, a jockey's cap on her head, and a coaching-whip in her hand; and her also the audience aided with the well-known refrain—

> *'And the chorus-girl she kisses me,*
> *As we spin along the road'*),

and was retiring from the stage amid loud applause, there

was a tapping at the door of the box. The next moment there appeared a gentleman in evening dress, with a large diamond in his shirt-front, and a very shiny hat. It was clear that he had not expected to find a lady in the box, for the moment he caught sight of Sabina he said, 'Oh, I beg your pardon,' and was about to retire.

'Come along, Morgan,' Fred Foster said at once. 'Let me introduce you to my wife—Mr. Morganti.'

Mr. Morganti gracefully removed his shiny hat, showing the diamonds on his fingers the while; but he seemed a little bit disconcerted, and still inclined to withdraw.

'Do you want to see me, old man?' Fred Foster asked, getting up from his seat.

'If you can spare me a couple of minutes.'

When they had gone away together Captain Raby said to Sabina, with his peculiar smile, 'I suppose you don't know who that was who had the pleasure of being introduced to you just now? That is Mr Morganti, the manager of this establishment. Mr. Morganti is a very important person; and his acquaintance is esteemed a high honour by many people. I am told that the young ladies who are engaged to perform here become very affable when you are introduced to them by Mr. Morganti; and that they will condescend to drink a little champagne, and even bring their husbands to join in—that is, when they've got one; and you may, perhaps, be allowed to drive the whole family-party out to Richmond of a Sunday.

They will entertain you certainly, if their wit lacks a little refinement.'

'I daresay there are as honest and well-intentioned people amongst them as among any other class,' Sabina said coldly.

'Intentions? Oh yes. Their intentions are all right, I suppose. Their manners are a little—well, affable. I should not wonder if at this very moment Miss Rosa Lee was begging your husband to give her a good thing for the Cesarewitch. They're very fond of racing, the people about music halls. Miss Kate Tremayne, who is about due now, was married to Jim Older, the jockey. *Was* married; Jim got out of that engagement, luckily; and Miss Tremayne is free to let her fancies roam. I am informed she is a very lively young person.'

Sabina's heart was hot within her with vexation; but she was too proud to show her anger. And how could she forbid him to talk to her? And what escape was there for her? Her husband was away. The phlegmatic Russell was wholly engrossed with the stage, staring vacuously at the successive performers, to the neglect of his brandy and soda. Moreover, had she not herself to blame? Had she not come of her own accord into this polluted atmosphere?

However, she obtained a temporary respite; for now Miss Tremayne appeared; and Miss Tremayne was so popular a favourite that even Captain Raby condescended to bestow a little attention on her. She was attired in all

kinds of cheap finery; her name was Bank Holiday Ann; she was supposed to be a maidservant set free for a jollification on Hampstead Heath; and she proceeded—in a voice about as musical as the sharpening of a saw—to describe the adventures of herself and her companions, there and elsewhere. As these included the getting drunk of the whole party, their being locked up for the night, and their appearance before a magistrate the next morning, there was no lack of incident; while the long spoken passages, delivered in a rapid jargon of Cockney accent and Cockney slang, seemed to find much favour with the audience, who also heartily joined in the chorus—

'Bank Holiday Annie,
Bank Holiday Ann,
Up the Heath,
And down the Heath,
And round the Heath she ran.
When the p'leeceman copt her,
She got him one on the eye;
O Annie, I'll tell your mother,
O fie, Annie, fie!'

But the idiotcy of this performance was refinement itself compared with the 'humour' of the leering cad who followed, whose vile innuendoes were so obvious that even Captain Raby had to talk rapidly to Sabina, about all kinds of things, to distract her notice. Probably, if Sabina had understood, she would have been a little bit thankful; but his attentions to her seemed now to have reached the height of persecution;

and as the atmosphere and surroundings and associations of the place were grown quite insufferable, she could only impatiently ask herself when her husband was coming to take her away. At last she said, 'Captain Raby, I wish to go. Do you think you could find my husband?'

'Well,' said he, blandly, 'I am not a *habitué* here; I understand that Mr. Morganti has a private room somewhere, where he keeps excellent cigars and spirits, but I have not the honour of the *entrée* into it. No doubt your husband is amusing himself well enough. Don't you think you had better stay? It ought to interest you, especially to study the kind of amusements that are popular with the masses of the people. Can't I get you something—some coffee?'

Sabina was rather paler about the lips than usual.

'Mr. Russell!' she said.

'I beg your pardon?' the younger man said, turning round at once.

Then she drew back; she had no wish to be left alone with Captain Raby, and he, noticing her hesitation, instantly rose.

'Oh, if you really wish to have your husband found, I will do my best,' he said; and he put on his crush-hat and left the box.

In a few minutes he returned with Fred Foster, who was in a gay mood.

'Well, what have you all been doing? You're not

going yet, Sabie? I've been transacting a little business with my noble friend, Morgy——'

'Was Miss Tremayne a party to the transaction?' asked Captain Raby, with a glance at Sabina.

'Kate Tremayne is a rattling clever girl—that's what I call her. All London has got hold of that chorus. She'll make a pot of money in the provinces. Do you really want to go, Sabie?'

'Yes.'

'Then we'll all go,' said Johnny Russell, rising. 'I've had enough, for one.'

At the front door, when the cab was called up, she was for parting with these two acquaintances with a polite bow; but both of them insisted on shaking hands with her; which ceremony she performed with a marked coldness. As soon as they were in the hansom, and were driving away, Fred Foster said to her, 'Well, what's the matter now?'

'It is of no consequence.'

'Come, out with it! I saw you had got on your high tragedy air. I guessed as much from what Raby said.'

'You have no right to ask me to meet a man like that,' Sabina was stung into saying. 'His conduct, his manner, is insufferable. And as for that place where we have been, why did you allow me to go there? You knew what it was—I did not.'

'You said you wanted to go.'

'I said I would go if you wished me to go; I wanted

to show them that what was right for you was right for me; do you think I would stand by and have Captain Raby openly sneering at you? But you needn't have taken me to such a place for all that.'

'Oh, you're one of the impossible ones,' said he, but with perfect good-humour. 'I know what has set your back up —the appearance in that box opposite of the gorgeous creature in green velvet and diamonds. Well, her get-up was striking, I admit; and so was her yellow hair, and her fan; but you know you can't compel everybody to tone down their appearance. Besides, I made certain you couldn't see the woman at all.'

'I did not see any such person,' Sabina said, with absolute truth.

'Then what's the matter? There was some very good singing. That sketch of Kate Tremayne's was awfully clever—as like the thing as could be; it was too like for me, indeed; I couldn't follow half what she said. Low comedy, of course, but still comedy; and a precious deal nearer real life than the comedy of the regular stage. I didn't see anything to object to in the performance.'

'Perhaps you were otherwise occupied,' she said. 'You did not consider how pleasant it was for me to sit in that box and have Captain Raby suggesting that you were at the time making bets with the women behind the stage.'

'Raby will have his joke,' he answered cheerfully. 'He was simply roaring when he came and told me of the

expression that had come over your face. And what there was to offend you I am sure I can't imagine.'

Indeed he was bent on laughing off the whole affair; and when they had got home, and when he had donned his dressing-gown and slippers, and lit a cigar, and mixed some whisky and water, and drawn his chair in towards the fire, he proceeded to remonstrate with her, but in a perfectly friendly and pleasant way, about her cultivation of impossible ideals and standards of conduct.

'The trouble with you, Sabie, is simply this,' he observed, 'that you are a great deal too good for this wretched and sinful world.'

CHAPTER XXIV

DIVERGENT WAYS

But next morning found him in a very different mood. He was silent and surly at first; then he began to remonstrate with her for her priggishness, as he chose to call it; finally he adopted a distinctly injured tone.

'Of course a man doesn't like to be laughed at. I shouldn't wonder if, the next time I see these two, it was to be "Hallo, Foster, how's Saint Cecilia? Come down from the clouds again? You shouldn't take that kind of a person to a music hall." Well, I'm not any fonder of music halls than other people, but I didn't see anything to offend you so mightily; and as for Raby and Russell—what did you expect? You expect too much, that's where the trouble is. You want people to live up to ideal standards that are quite impossible. Wouldn't it be a little more sensible to take the world as it is? And it's all the more extraordinary in your case, for you haven't been brought up in a glass house or a nunnery; you've seen plenty of life——'

'I have seen a great deal of poverty, if that is what you

mean,' Sabina said calmly. 'But poverty is not contemptible.'

'What is contemptible, then? Whatever doesn't come up to your perfectly impossible standards? Well, I prefer to take the world as it is. I never professed to live in a select circle of archangels; I never met any; ordinary men and women are good enough for me.'

She did not answer him; perhaps she had done him an injury in the sight of his friends; perhaps he had cause to complain. And perhaps, too, that was the reason he made no further reference to his proposal that he should accompany her down to Hammersmith; on the contrary, when he had lit his after-breakfast cigar, and got his coat and hat and cane, he merely said that he would be back as usual in the evening, and so he went his way.

Sabina was a little down-hearted that day, Janie Wygram thought; and as they were walking along the former confessed that sometimes she grew dispirited, and began to doubt the efficacy of the network of charitable associations that were trying to do something to lighten the misery of the great city. Perhaps it was true that the weakest must go to the wall; that the vast social forces must work out their own salvation; and that all attempts to interfere with them were useless, or useful only in handing on a legacy of incompetence to the next generation? Of course she did not say so in these words; but that was the drift of what she said; and very much astonished and grieved

was Janie Wygram to find her in any such hopeless mood.

'Why, that's not like you at all, Sabie!' she exclaimed. 'Don't you remember what you said—that one single act of kindness done every day in the week made the world just so much better? I don't think you see yourself half the good you do; but I know what it would be to me, if I were lying ill, to have you come in and talk to me for a minute or two. Oh yes, I have heard plenty of that kind of argument—that charity only perpetuates sickness, and creates paupers, and so forth. But I don't see how trying to make people well is helping on sickness; and it isn't making paupers to get people into situations who would otherwise be idle; and as for the social forces——' Here Janie paused for a moment, for the subject was a large one. 'Well, I don't know much about the social forces; but I should think if they saw ragged brats taken out of the gutter, and washed and clothed and educated, and turned into those fine young fellows on board the *Chichester* and the *Arethusa*, well, then, the social forces ought to be very much obliged. Oh, don't you give in, Sabie, whoever gives in. If you only knew what you are in many and many and many a home!'

Settling-day came and went, but Fred Foster forgot about the twenty-five pounds he had promised Sabina; and she did not choose to remind him; she would rather try, by practising the most rigid economy, to get along with

what she had. And at this time, indeed, Mr. Foster had need of all available funds; for the racing world was very busy just then, as it always is towards the close of the season; and he was away a good deal in various parts of the country. He went down to the Manchester Meeting. Then came Newmarket, where his usual good luck deserted him; both the Cesarewitch and the Middle Park Plate hit him hard. She heard of his having paid a flying visit to Scotland. He was for a few days at the Duke of Exminster's training quarters at Helmingsley. Then he returned to Newmarket for the Cambridgeshire Handicap. And always, amid these various and continued engagements, when he chose to run up to town to those snug little rooms in the Strand, Sabina was ready with the kindest welcome for him, and was assiduous about his small comforts, and there was no look of reproach or of appeal in the calm and serious and beautiful face.

'Oh, mother, what has come over Sabie?' Janie Wygram said one evening (and now there was another admitted to these colloquies—a young man with a pale face, large, earnest eyes, and long hair; Philip Drexel was his name; and he was no impatient listener; when either these two or any others of the women down Kensington way were singing the praise of Sabina, as sometimes they did, the young artist's voice was eager in the chorus; and he stood unrebuked of Janie; nay, he knew it was the one sure way to win her favour). 'She has been quite different

of late,' Janie continued. 'No one sees it as I do, for no one is so much with her. She never laughs now—never, never; and she is never impatient and masterful with the people, or scolding, as she used to be; but always so gentle with them; and so grave and compassionate; and her face —well—well, her face, I think, is more beautiful than ever, but there is a kind of sadness and loneliness in it that I can't understand; and sometimes she will walk ever so far with you without a single word, though the moment you speak she is as patient and kind as ever. I don't think he actually ill-treats her——'

Here Janie's mild eyes flashed, and her lips were rather pale.

'No, if I thought that, I would get Philip to go and smash him, or I would—I would ask Walter Lindsay to come across the Atlantic and kill him. I don't think it's that; but she is very much alone; and perhaps her marriage hasn't turned out what she thought it would—though she won't allow a single word to be said. Why, she is not the least like the Sabie Zembra we used to know! Don't you remember her—so merry, and proud, and courageous, and just bewildering people with her pretty face and her good-humour. That was when Walter Lindsay wanted to paint her—the maiden queen, you know, in scarlet and ermine —was it from Chaucer the lines were?'

Janie should have remembered that there was another artist listening, who had also thought of Sabina as the

central figure of certain half-imagined compositions. Even at this moment was there not before his mind some faint and wavering vision of

'The groves
Where the Lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose names
Are five sweet symphonies,
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret, and Rosalys.
Circlewise sit they, with bound locks,
And forehead garlanded;
Into the fine cloth white like flame
Weaving the golden thread,
To fashion the birth-robes for them
Who are just born, being dead.'

'And there's another strange thing,' continued Janie, who was never tired of talking about her best-beloved, 'she has nothing like the nerve she used to have. You know Sabie was never very sentimental; I used to think her a little too robust in that direction. But now a very trifling thing will bring tears to her eyes, though she is desperately anxious to hide it. The other day we were going through Stanhope Gardens. There was a window open; and some children were singing, with the mother leading on a harmonium; and I stopped Sabie for a minute. Well, it was "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide;" and, do you know, the singing of the children quite upset her, and she went on quickly so that I should not see. You know, mother, that's not like Sabie; she never was sentimental; I believe it is

loneliness that is breaking her heart. There's that little boy Watson that was run over; he came back the other day from Brighton—she had sent him to the Convalescent Home for a fortnight—and she went down to see how he was. Well, it was a little bit affecting to see how bewildered he had been by the sight of the sea, for he had never before been out of London in his life; but Sabie is used to such things; and I've seen her pretty sharp sometimes with women for crying aimlessly; but this time, when she said to the poor little fellow, "Well, Johnny, tell me what you thought of the sea when you first saw it," and when he said, looking up at her, "Please, miss, I thought it was like 'evin," she stopped for a minute uncertain—of course not wanting to break down—and then she had to turn away, and I saw her dry her eyes. Mother, it is not the least like Sabie to be in a nervous state like that, is it?—she who was always so full of courage and bright humour and briskness. Of course, there is one thing: you know she had sent him down for a fortnight; and it's five shillings a week at the Black Rock House; and I know she was debating whether she should not let him have another fortnight; and then she thought she could not afford the other ten shillings. And, perhaps, when she saw what a treat it had been to the poor little fellow, she was sorry she had not given him the other fortnight—getting the money somehow.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Wygram bitterly, 'and her father rolling in wealth; and her husband drinking champagne with his

dinner every night in the week; and that poor creature saving every penny to do good to others. It's little the world knows how selfish the people may be that are drinking wine and flaunting about in carriages——'

'I'm sure they might flaunt about in carriages, or drink all the wine in the world, if only they'd make Sabie a little happier,' Janie said wistfully. 'I think she grows more like an angel every day, in her goodness and gentleness; but do you imagine I like it? No, I don't. I would rather have her bad and wicked——'

'Janie,' the mother remonstrated; but she added with a smile—'Well, it's no use talking like that about Sabina, for it can't mean anything at all.'

'Very well, then, mother, I will say this only—that I wish she was a little more like the Sabie Zembra we used to know. Sometimes, when I look at her now, my heart is pretty heavy about her. And I am not as near to her as I used to be; she seems to live within herself, somehow; and there's never a word said; her husband's name is hardly ever mentioned—when it is, Sabie is always on his side, and has excuses for his being away, and all that. But she is not like our Sabie that we used to know.'

Now, if Sabina was ever ready with excuses for her husband's absence, that was a good deal more than Fred Foster cared to be. He took it as quite natural, in their straitened circumstances, that he should try to pick up a few sovereigns in the only way known to him; and he

plainly intimated that if she chose to occupy most of her time in looking after other people's affairs, he, at least, preferred to attend to his own proper business. Once, indeed, he offered to let her accompany him. It was on the eve of the Brighton and Lewes race meetings.

'What do you say to going down for the week, to have a look at the old place?' he said. 'You would find it lively at this time of the year—the King's Road in November is pretty brisk. We could put up at the Bedford—I like the coffee-room——'

'Thank you, Fred, but I think I would rather not go,' she answered.

'Why? I suppose because you don't want to meet Raby or any of those fellows. Well, you wouldn't. They'll be at the Old Ship, if they are at Brighton at all. Don't you think you would be safe enough at the Bedford? There's a ladies' room you might shut yourself up in, if you're so terribly afraid.'

She took no heed of the taunt.

'It isn't that. But I'd rather not go,' she said, gently.

'Oh, you grudge the time, I suppose? You can't tear yourself away from your beloved slums?'

'No, it isn't the time either,' she said. 'It is the expense. I should not feel very happy about it; so please don't ask me.'

'Oh, well, you can stop at home if you like,' he said; and there was an end of that proposal.

However, matters mended very much at Christmas, for they were to spend that holiday with the old people; and whatever was best in Foster's nature and disposition invariably came to the front when his mother's influence was brought to bear on him. A few days before Christmas the old lady came to town, to do some shopping and take her daughter-in-law back with her; and as soon as she had installed herself in an old-fashioned little hotel near Charing Cross that is much patronised by Buckinghamshire folk, she hurried along to see Sabina. She had arrived earlier than was expected; Fred Foster was out; she found Sabina alone.

'My dear, my dear,' she said with some concern, and she took the girl's two hands, and kissed her on both cheeks, and drew her to the window, 'you're not looking at all well! What is the matter? Have you been ill?'

'Oh no,' Sabina said—and for the moment her face was all lit up with gladness at finding this kind friend near her again; there seemed comfort in her mere presence.

'But this will never do—we must see whether the country air can bring back the roses to your cheeks,' said this gentle mother-in-law, and she kept patting the girl's hand. 'And every time you wrote you wrote from London—have you never been away from London since we saw you?'

'No,' she answered. 'But you know I am quite used to that.'

'But you shouldn't be used to it,' Mrs. Foster said sharply. 'I suppose Fred has been flying about the country just as he ever did?'

'He has been away at times,' Sabina answered evasively.

'And how has he been behaving?' the elder lady said, with some little scrutiny in her eyes. 'Pretty much as usual, I suppose? Yes; but we thought he was going to turn over a new leaf when he married. And so glad I am that you are coming down to us now, for you will have to be the peacemaker—indeed you will, my dear.'

Sabina looked up inquiringly.

'That wretched boy has been getting into trouble again with his father,' the mother said, with a rueful leniency. 'Writing for money I suppose; and never a word about Crookfield, or settling down anywhere else. Indeed, my dear, I think it's mostly on your behalf that his father is so angry; so you'll have to be the peacemaker—and you'll find it easy enough with that pretty face of yours.'

The old lady now made Sabina sit down, and took a chair opposite to her, and proceeded to open a somewhat capacious and country-looking purse.

'Now, my dear, I have brought you a little Christmas present; and I know what is most useful to a young housekeeper, being a housekeeper myself.'

She took out a little packet of bank-notes, all neatly folded, and bound together with a tiny elastic band; and then she counted them.

'Yes, ten; and as each is a ten-pound note, you mustn't leave them lying about, my dear.'

She put the little packet into the girl's hand, and closed her fingers over it.

'Dear mother, it is so very good of you,' Sabina said—and her eyes were grateful enough. 'If you only knew how much I shall be able to do with it—just at this time, too—I confess I was a little down-hearted about going away into the country and leaving so many small things undone. And I will be very, very careful. I suppose I may take ten pounds for myself, if I give the rest to Fred.'

'What!' the elder woman cried instantly. 'You foolish child, I tell you that that is for your own private purse, every farthing of it! To Fred! Well, I used to help Master Freddie a little, but I'm done with him now, until he settles down and conducts himself like a respectable married man. For your own private purse, my dear, every farthing of it!'

'Ah, but you don't know,' Sabina said with downcast eyes. 'I shall be glad to give it to him. I wish it was in a clearer sense my own. I wish it came from my family.'

'Why?'

The girl hesitated; then she looked up in a piteous way, as if appealing to this kind friend not to misunderstand her.

'Don't think I am saying anything against him, or would mean to do that,' she said timidly. 'But—but

sometimes I cannot get it out of my head that Fred appears to think I married him under false pretences. He wouldn't say it,' she added instantly. 'But—but sometimes he seems to think it—and—and of course—if he really was quite certain that my father would do something more for me than he has done—well, the disappointment is only natural. Dear Mrs. Foster, I shall be so glad to give him this money; but don't you understand how I could wish it to be more clearly my very own to give?'

'I understand more than you think,' said Mrs. Foster, angrily. 'Has Fred been worrying you about money?'

But Sabina would make no such admission; she evaded that question and a good many others that Mrs. Foster put; and indeed the arrival of Fred Foster himself shortly brought these suspicious inquiries to a close.

For the sake of variety, they went down to Missenden by the familiar old omnibus that still starts—or recently started—from the Bell in Holborn—that is to say, they leisurely drove away down by Uxbridge, and Chalfont St. Giles, and Amersham; and they had not left the great city far behind when the fresh, sweet-smelling country air began to be very grateful to Sabina, who had been so long pent up in the town. Both the ladies were outside, for this was a very mild December; and though there had been rain in the night, there was now a clear, watery sunshine flooding the wide landscape; and what wind there was touched the cheek softly enough. And the farther they went away into the

open country, the more beautiful, it seemed to Sabina, everything became; there was a strange clearness abroad; and a multitude of colours to delight the eye. The gray-green of the commons; the deeper greens of holly and ivy; the russet of withered beech and withered fern; the purple red of the haws; the scarlet berries of the bryony; the black berries of the elder; the white waxen-like berries of the mistletoe high up on some gnarled old apple-tree—all these were shining in this humid sunlight, that seemed to call up vapours and pleasant scents from the long swathes of ploughed field and fallow. Of course, long before they reached Missenden night had fallen over the land; but it was not much of a winter's night; Sabina regretted that the day's drive had come to an end.

And very speedily it appeared that there had been some rather serious quarrel between father and son; for the old gentleman would scarce take any notice of Mr. Fred Foster; but devoted his whole attention to Sabina, making her his constant confidante and companion. During these next few days Sabina nestled down into this quiet domestic life with a curious unwonted sense of comfort and peace. For a long time back she had found herself very homeless and very lonely; and now these good people were surrounding her with every possible little kindness; and she was abundantly grateful. Even Fred Foster, in the society of his mother, showed himself in the best of humours; and by dint of sheer audacity succeeded in establishing some better

relations between the old man and himself. He went out shooting most of the time—picking up a stray bird or a hare occasionally; while Sabina talked to the old gentleman in the greenhouses; or walked arm-in-arm with Mrs. Foster through the dank, faint-smelling garden.

It was on one of these latter occasions that the old lady again broached the subject of the young people coming and settling down in the country. Sabina paused for a moment in their walk, and regarded her friend with a somewhat wistful look.

'I almost think it would be better,' she said. 'I used to fear it would be selfish—to give up everything, when there is so much that can be done to help people who are greatly in need of help. And I suppose it would be selfish. But I find now that I cannot do as much as I used to do; well, the mere want of money interferes, though money isn't everything in that kind of work. And one feels the need of a home—where one can rest at times.'

'Oh yes, yes, yes, my dear,' the old lady said with eager kindness. 'I am sure you are right. Of course, you want a home. And Crookfield could be made so nice and comfortable for you; just the prettiest place imaginable; and far enough away, too, to save you from intrusion—you wouldn't have an ill-natured old mother-in-law coming prying and poking her nose in at every minute. But you may depend on this, my dear child, that anything my husband

or myself could do to make you perfectly happy—well, it would be done pretty quickly, I think.'

'Ah, you are all too good to me down here,' Sabina said with a bit of a sigh: she was thinking of her life in London.

But as soon as Mrs. Foster found a convenient opportunity she went to her son.

'Fred,' she said, 'do you know that Sabie is quite willing to live in the country?'

'Oh, is she?' he responded, with some indifference.

'Now don't you think this would be a great chance for you to give up your idle life?' she pleaded. 'Even to get a proper home for Sabie would be something. She is not looking well at all. She wants rest and quiet.'

'Do you mean at Crookfield?' he asked, with a smile.

'Yes, I do.'

'Then you don't know what you're talking about, mother. She would be sick and tired of it in a week. Her heart would be back in those slums, where she spends the whole of her time and every farthing that she can appropriate with decency. As if there was such an abundance of money flying about!'

'But what is this about money now?' his mother asked. 'She says that you are disappointed. Did you ever look forward to living upon her income?'

'I looked forward to our joining our not immense fortunes,' said he, with much equanimity, 'so as to share the domestic expenses. It's a usual kind of thing, I believe.'

'And now you are disappointed with her because her father will not give her as much as you expected?'

He did not answer this; he was busy filling some cartridges.

'At all events,' his mother said, warmly, 'you have no right to say that she deceived you, or to think it even—she is incapable of any such thing—you should be ashamed to imagine such a thing.'

'I don't know what you mean!'

'Well, perhaps it is a mere fancy on her part—I hope it is—I hope for your own sake it is; but I know what she thinks—she thinks that you have got to imagine that she married you under false pretences.'

'Oh, she thinks that, does she?' he said, carelessly, and he locked up the cartridge-box and put it aside. 'Well, I never said so, anyway.'

And with that he got his cap and went out, whistling for the retriever that was lying asleep in the yard.

CHAPTER XXV

ALTERED PLANS

On their return to town Sabina gave her husband £80 out of the £100 she had received from the old lady; and this came in handy; for, if there was no racing just then, he was busy enough with pigeon-shooting and billiards, and also there was a little speculation going on about the Waterloo Cup. But it must not be imagined that he was in any wise grateful for the gift. He knew very well that, had Sabina not been in the case, he would have had the whole of that sum; and he knew that the twenty pounds would be frittered away on objects of which he wholly and sulkily disapproved. For he had come to grumble not a little about her work in the slums, and her attendance upon charitable societies. It was a mere waste of time and money, he said. A married woman ought to devote herself to her own home. On the rare occasions on which he had returned to their rooms at mid-day, he had found her almost invariably absent; and there was a difficulty about luncheon; for the landlady was unprepared for such contingencies. To be sure, Sabina had offered to be at home every day at one, if he wished it; but

this again was absurd; for how could he bind himself by any such hard-and-fast rule? As regards the money, were they in a position to indulge in indiscriminate charity? Moreover, her rigid economy (which he declared to be perfectly ridiculous) was in a kind of way a standing reproach to him. It seemed to accuse him of extravagance, whereas he was merely living as always he had lived. It made him look foolish in the eyes of his friends, when they passed Sabina and himself in a restaurant, that he should be drinking wine and she only water. Why should she not drink wine? She would be ready enough to prescribe it for sick people down in Hammersmith; why shouldn't she prescribe it for herself, seeing that she was looking none too well? He saw no virtue in self-sacrifice; it was a pure delusion; the best thing for everybody was for each to do the best for himself.

In the meanwhile these representations took no practical shape, for now came the hurdle-racing at Kempton and Sandown and Croydon to engage his attention—with the Lincoln Spring Meeting looming in the near future; and he was absent from town a good deal; and Sabina was left to the freedom of her own solitary ways. But when he came back he said to her one evening: 'Look here, I've been thinking things over, and I don't see that we get value for our money out of these rooms.'

He did not, at any rate.

'They are expensive; and it's an expensive way of living,

as you say—dining at restaurants and all that; when we started them, of course, I expected we should have a wider margin, but I suppose that is all over now. Well, now, didn't I understand from the Mater, when we were down in Buckinghamshire, that you were willing to live in the country?'

'It was a kind of fancy,' she said, absently.

'But either you did say you were willing or you didn't,' he retorted, with a touch of impatience.

'Yes, I said I thought it might be better,' she answered, with a little hesitation. 'They were very kind to me down there. I liked the quiet life. If I were only thinking of myself——'

'Well, then, I take it you are willing to live in the country,' he said, interrupting her. 'And I think you are quite right. It will be much healthier, and cheaper too, if it is properly managed. I will look out for a convenient little place, not too far from town——'

She looked up in some bewilderment.

'But don't you mean Crookfield?'

'Crookfield!' he said with a laugh. 'Crookfield! I should think not! Ten miles away from the nearest railway station! No, thank you; I don't want to play Robinson Crusoe.'

'But it was about Crookfield your mother was thinking when she spoke of our going to live in the country,' Sabina said—not seeing how she had been entrapped.

'Oh yes, I know. She said so. But I don't propose to turn farmer; it's the worst-paying game there is nowadays; my father will do much better to take whatever rent he can get for the place. I want quarters much more convenient than that—near to Epsom, perhaps—Banstead is handy—or Leatherhead—anyway we must not get beyond the pale of civilisation altogether.'

And so Sabina had pledged herself—without too closely asking herself why—to forsake all those pursuits and occupations that had been the solace of a somewhat lonely life, to leave her friends behind her, and to go away into the country, she knew not whither. Of course, when she announced this startling intelligence to Janie Wygram, she had to adduce reasons. It was her husband's wish, to begin with. They had found their means a little straitened; they would be able to live more economically. Then her husband had complained of her spending so much of her time away from home; perhaps they would be more together in the course of a country life. These and several other reasons she placed before Janie; she did not add—perhaps she would not have confessed to herself—that she was sick and sore at heart; and that she had welcomed this change, as she would have welcomed any change, in a kind of despair.

Now this is what Janie Wygram instantly said to herself, 'The contemptible brute!—he grudges her every farthing that she pinches and saves out of her own income; and he

is carrying her off to the country so that he may have every penny to himself.'

But this was what Janie Wygram (who was a loyal lass, and had not forgotten Walter Lindsay's parting injunctions) said to Sabina: 'Ah, well, Sabie, I daresay he is a little bit jealous of the time you give to other people. It's only natural, isn't it? And then he is quite right about the healthier air; and you haven't been looking your best of late, you know. Dear me, I wonder what Kensington will be like without you. There was always the chance of meeting you in the street somewhere. I never went out of the house without thinking, "Well now, perhaps Sabie is just coming round the corner." And there's many and many a home will miss you, Sabie.'

Sabina was standing at the window, looking out on the wintry trees and bushes of Kensington Square, and her back was turned to her friend. When Janie went to her, and put her arm within her arm, she was greatly surprised to find that the girl's eyes were filled with tears.

'Sabie, you are not glad about going!' she exclaimed breathlessly. 'It vexes you? You are not happy about it?'

Sabina dried her eyes quickly.

'Oh, it will be all right,' she said. 'I daresay it will be all right. When there are so many real troubles in the world it is no use bothering about sentimental ones.'

'But you don't want to go!'

'I suppose the whole of life is more or less of an experiment,' Sabina said, 'and you can't tell how any part of it may turn out. I hope this will be for the better.'

Janie looked at her, wondering whether she was going to speak more plainly, and yet almost afraid. But the calm and beautiful face was quite passive; and the hazel eyes—that used to be so clear and shining with mirth, or filled with a soft and benignant kindness—were now almost apathetic, not to say hopeless.

'You will have to be very good to my poor people, Janie,' she said, with an effort at cheerfulness. 'You know their ways. And you will be more patient with them than I was.'

'Me?' said Janie. 'And you think I could ever take your place? It's little you know what you have been to them, Sabie. It isn't money, mind; as far as that goes, there would be no great difficulty. For do you know what Philip has done?—he is such a noble fellow! You remember, I told you that Walter Lindsay had written over to say that it would be a great favour to him if we would occupy his house after we got married. And you know, Sabie, Philip is pretty well off; his people are very well off indeed; and he himself has been very lucky in getting commissions—he is very popular in Liverpool and Birkenhead, where they've plenty of money to spend on pictures—so that when I told him of Mr. Lindsay's offer, he laughed at first, and didn't like the notion of having a

house rent-free. But it happens that the studio is the very thing he wants; and he is so very busy that he can't bother about building one for himself at present; so he came to me the day before yesterday and said that as soon as we were married we would settle down there, only that he would prefer paying rent. And where was the rent to go to? Walter Lindsay would not take it. Well, it was to be handed over to you and me, to help deserving people. Wasn't that kind? So, you see, it isn't the money. But when you talk about my taking your place, it's little you know. It wasn't money so much as courage you brought them. They did whatever you asked them to do. Will you come and bid them good-bye before you go, Sabie?'

The girl's lips quivered for an instant.

'No,' she answered. 'What would be the use? That would be mere sentiment. What is the use of sentiment?'

'It would be kindness, Sabie. And you never refused them that.'

There was no answer. Sabina had got into the habit of late of leaving conversations unended; her mind seemed much preoccupied.

On the morning after Fred Foster's return from the Lincoln and Liverpool Meetings he was standing at the window of their sitting-room, looking down into the Strand. It was rather a cheerful sort of morning for March, and there was a springlike feeling in the air. After a while he turned to Sabina.

'I have to run down to Epsom—to Witstead, rather,' said he, 'to see some friends of mine there about a little bit of business. Would you care to go for the day? I daresay they would give us some lunch; and we could come back in the afternoon.'

Now this was a most unexpected proposal; for never once, since the unlucky episode of the music hall and Captain Raby, had he offered to introduce her to any of his associates; just as never once had he brought either friend or acquaintance home to these lodgings. But Sabina assented forthwith, and cheerfully; and she went away to make herself as neat and smart as possible; and was resolved to show herself grateful for his consideration, and as amiable as might be. In the hansom going down to Victoria Station he said rather apologetically, 'You know they're not very distinguished people, those Deanes we are going to see. But they're good enough kind of folk; and the world's made up of all sorts; we've got to take them as they are.'

The apology was unnecessary; Sabina was determined, not upon taking them as they were, but upon making the best of them, whoever they might be. And indeed the little trip promised to be very pleasant. Once away from London, the clear country light was a cheerful thing to look at; and the air that blew in at the carriage-window was mild and sweet; and she could not but think that along the hedgerows there—in the sheltered places—or on

the warm sunny banks—or in the clearances of the woods—the firstlings of the year must be appearing now: the red dead-nettle, the ground ivy, here and there a patch of pale primroses, a sweet violet half-hidden among the withered grass. She would like to have brought a dozen or so of the children she knew, and turned them loose into these wooded lanes. Fred Foster was reading a newspaper; and she had leisure to picture them straying through the drier glades, or chasing each other over the wide commons. She could almost hear them laughing. It was a spring day, fit for children and children's delights.

They were received at Witstead Station by Mr. Deane himself, who seemed to have dressed himself in a gay fashion for this occasion. He was distinctly a horsey-looking man, of about five and thirty, with a thin, dried, good-humoured face, small, clear eyes, and neatly-cut whiskers. Towards Sabina he was particularly civil, not to say obsequious; told her that he had that very morning been reading a speech of her father's; and—though they differed in politics—he considered it a remarkably able speech, remarkably able. And might he have the pleasure of introducing his wife, who was waiting outside the station with the pony-chaise? Mrs. Deane turned out to be a buxom and rather pretty little person of about eight and twenty, with cheeks like the rose, merry blue eyes, and a manner that was chirrupy and cheerful to the verge of audacity. And as the gentlemen preferred to walk, Mrs.

Deane would have Sabina take a seat beside her in the pony-chaise; and then they drove away together—towards the little straggling village of Witstead, that is dotted in a staccato fashion along a bit of the Guildford road.

The distance from the station to the village is barely over three-quarters of a mile; but Fred Foster and his companion would appear to have walked rather slowly—no doubt talking over their business affairs; for before they arrived at Wayside Cottage the mistress of that small establishment had had time to introduce Sabina to her family, as she called her miscellaneous collection of pets. Other family had she none; but these afforded her sufficient interest and occupation, what with her cockatoos, and white mice, and love-birds, and marmosets, and squirrels, and kittens, and canaries. Indeed, by the time that the voluble and roseate little woman had expatiated on the merits and virtues and tricks and failings of this host of favourites, and by the time that Fred Foster and his companion had finished their talk in the little bit of front garden overlooking the front road, Mrs. Deane begged to be excused, for that now she had to be off to get luncheon hurried up.

Well, Sabina was not much interested in these good people; but she was in no wise offended by them; and during this little banquet she tried to be as amiable and responsive to all their kindness as she well could be. Of course Mrs. Deane monopolised most of her attention; for Fred Foster and his friend were discussing the recent

University Boat-race, and also certain wrestling contests then going on at Lillie Bridge. And soon it appeared that this gay and rubicund little lady had a most astonishing acquaintance with what was to the fore in the way of amusements in London. She knew all the pieces at the theatres; she had heard all the new music; from Muswell-hill and its racing to the Crystal Palace and its fireworks, she and her husband seemed to have been everywhere and to have seen everything.

'I should have thought,' Sabina said, in some surprise, 'that you would have found it difficult to get much to the theatre—living in a remote place like this——'

'Bless you,' said the other cheerfully, 'that is the advantage of living anywhere within a reasonable driving distance of Epsom; the late trains make it so easy. Did you think we were buried alive down here? Oh, I think we know a little of what's going on in town.'

'So it would seem,' Sabina said, smiling.

On the other hand, whenever the conversation was general, Mr. Deane's manner towards Sabina was most deferential; and he warmly expressed concurrence with whatever she said; and was pleased to grin when that happened to be something cheerful. Nor, when luncheon was over, could he be induced to light a cigar in that room, though everybody else was willing that he should do so; he refused flatly, and said that he and Foster would smoke on their way over to the stables of a great house near by,

which they had promised to visit. Then, again, instead of at once following Fred Foster out to the front gate, he found a chance of calling his wife aside, and said quickly, 'Mind this, Susie, if you're singing any songs now, be a little careful. Don't have any of the "a little-later-on-in-the-evening" kind, there's a good girl.'

'Don't be alarmed,' said Mrs. Deane, with a cheerful little giggle; 'I'm not going to sing any songs. I'm going to take her for a drive to Box Hill. I think she's an awfully nice girl. Whatever made her marry Fred Foster?'

'Women do strange things,' her husband said. 'I suppose it was the accident that brought it about.'

'Then there's another thing, Jim,' she said. 'I wish you wouldn't allow Fred Foster to jump on you. What right has he to patronise you? Ain't you as good as he is? —well, I should think so! Just you cheek him a bit—it'll do him all the good in the world. You keep him in his place, Jim. His wife's worth a dozen of him—set him up!'

When the two husbands were gone their wives got into the pony-chaise, Mrs. Deane taking the reins; and presently they were driving away along the Surrey highway, on a spring day that was pleasant enough, with its purple clouds, and silver light, and warm humid air. And somehow Sabina preferred Mrs. Deane in the pony-chaise to Mrs. Deane at table; for in the pony-chaise she looked so trim and neat and jolly, whereas at table she had a trick of

trying to eat and speak at once—a practice which saves time, to be sure, but is not otherwise to be admired. They drove away down by Mickleham and Juniper Hill and Burford Bridge; then they struck off the main highway to make the ascent of Box Hill; and here Mrs. Deane surrendered the reins to Sabina, to let the patient and stout little cob face the long zigzags at his ease, while she took a bee-line up the hill with a lightness of foot that showed she was used to the neighbourhood. She got in again at the top; and then they made away for Headley Heath and Walton Downs—in no wise hurrying the drive, indeed, for they had plenty of time, and the day was mild for March.

The blithe little Mrs. Deane seemed rather curious to learn in what measure Sabina was acquainted with, or interested in, her husband's pursuits, though here Sabina was reticent enough; and also she wanted to know how a mere bicycle accident should have led to acquaintanceship, and then friendship, and then marriage.

'I wonder whether he will be quite up to his old form next week,' she said.

'But how?' Sabina asked.

'In the steeplechase.'

'What steeplechase?'

'Why, don't you know? The Spring Steeplechase at Manchester. I fancy that this is the first one he has ridden since that accident; that's a long time for a man to be

kept away from what used to be his favourite hobby. The loss of money, too; a hundred to nothing is a nice little bet when one is hard up.'

'Do you go much to races?' Sabina ventured to inquire.

'I? Not I! The ordinary race-meetings are no use for women at all; the men are after business—not after lunches and swell gowns and gloves. But when your own set have pulled off a good thing, and the men are back in town, then you may have a very nice time; they're free-handed then; easy come, easy go; there are a good many little presents about. But the bookie wins in the end—yes, and all along the way, too; it's no good the clever ones thinking they can stand against the market odds, though they may have a stroke of luck now and again. Your husband was awful lucky last year.'

'Was he?' Sabina said, and then, as that sounded as if she were strangely ignorant of her husband's affairs, she instantly added, 'Yes, I believe he was. They say he is a very good judge of horses—and—and the one he has a share in did very well last year, I believe. But I don't understand much about it.'

'The less you know the better,' said Mrs. Deane, curtly. 'I've heard a good deal too much.'

In course of time they got back to Wayside Cottage, and found that the two husbands had returned; and as there was a train due in about half an hour, they did not take the pony out; they merely stopped for a cup of tea,

and then Mrs. Deane drove Sabina to the station. Fred Foster arrived there a few minutes afterwards; and presently they were on their way back to town.

'A nice little cottage, that?' he said inquiringly.

'Oh yes,' she answered.

'I should think the garden would look pretty in the summer.'

'Yes; and they have a good deal of fruit, Mrs. Deane says.'

'What kind of a trap was that—comfortable?'

'Very.'

'And the cob?—it seemed to me a nicish-looking beast?'

'It is very quiet,' Sabina answered; 'and very willing at the hill work.'

'Ah,' said he, 'I'm glad you approve of the place, for I've just taken it over from my worthy friend Deane.'

'Do you mean we are to live there?' Sabina said, somewhat aghast.

'If you are to live anywhere at all in the country, I don't see where you could get a prettier place, or a more convenient,' he said, cheerfully. 'And we may have it at once. They're removing to Newmarket. Mrs. Deane doesn't know as yet, though; guess she'll tear her hair—and his too—when she's told; for she is rather fond of a little fling in town. And I've taken over the cob and pony-chaise, too, though it's needless to say I haven't paid for them yet.

If the beast is quiet, you'll have no trouble about driving him; it will be quite an occupation for you.'

And thus came to an end Sabina's mission-work in London; she was no longer an 'angel in the house,' or, rather, in many, many houses. She was now merely Mrs. Foster, of Wayside Cottage, Witstead.

CHAPTER XXVI

A MESSAGE

No sooner was Sabina installed in her new home than she began to try to make it as neat and pretty and attractive as might be; and she had plenty of leisure to do so, for, as it happened, Fred Foster had to be down at Northampton just at this time. And no doubt through all these little preparations there ran the wistful hope that on his return he might perhaps be a little more kind and considerate towards her than he had been. Nay, she began to take herself to task, and to seek reasons for his apparent discontent with her. Perhaps her character was somewhat too severe? Perhaps it was true that she had impossible standards of duty and conduct, that only served to disconcert people? Perhaps she ought to aim at being a little more like Mrs. Deane, whose robustly merry spirits seemed to please her husband very well? Perhaps she was too straitlaced—too exacting—not tolerant enough of other people's ways and opinions and pursuits? For Sabina could hardly believe that this alteration in his manner towards her was due merely to disappointment over money

matters. Why, before marriage, what she had chiefly admired in him was his courageous cheerfulness in making the best of any circumstances. It is true that his mother said on one occasion, 'Well, Sabina, I am afraid Fred is a spoiled child, and I am afraid I am partly responsible for it; but he is very good-humoured and nice so long as he has his own way.'

But surely he was having his own way now? She had given up all the interests of her life to please him; she was ready to obey his slightest wish; she would try to mould her character, her opinions, her conduct, in any direction that would be agreeable to him. And perhaps, when he returned, he would be a little more kind to her?—and remain a little more with her? And she would not forget to be grateful to him for his not insisting on her personally going to seek money from her father.

But when Fred Foster's mother heard of their removal to this furnished house in Surrey, she was exceedingly angry, and wrote a long and indignant letter to Sabina about her son's perversity, as she chose to consider it. On Foster's return from Northampton, he found this protest awaiting him, for he had enjoined Sabina to preserve for him all letters coming from his mother; and when he had read it, he pitched it back impatiently on to the chimney-piece.

'Yes,' he said, turning to Sabina, 'I suppose you wrote complaining that it was a lonely place—that there wasn't enough society for you.'

'Oh no, Fred, I did not,' she said, rather timidly. 'I —I—said I was afraid you would find it dull; it was about you that I wrote——'

'Oh, you may make your mind easy about me,' said he, carelessly. 'You needn't imagine that I am going to sit down and bite my nails—or plant kidney beans. I can't afford it. Our circumstances aren't so flourishing as all that; I must be about just as much as ever; you needn't bother about me.'

Then he began to make inquiries about the arrangements she had made with the Epsom tradesmen; and it was clear that he meant this household to be conducted with a view to economy.

'Of course,' said he, 'the simplest way to pay Jim Deane for the cob and the pony-chaise would be to sell them both; and that would save old Noel's wages, besides the keep of the cob——'

'But how should we get the things out from Epsom?' she asked.

'You could send the girl in by train at a pinch. Or I daresay most of the Epsom tradesmen have carts. But I shan't decide on that yet; we'll see what Newmarket does for me. Oh, by the way, if you have any questions to ask of Mrs. Deane, just jot them down on a piece of paper. I shall see her to-morrow night most likely.'

'Are you going away again, then?' Sabina asked, without raising her eyes.

'Yes; I'm going down to Newmarket to-morrow.'

So Sabina was left once more alone; and somehow she was more hopeless now, as she tried this or that bit of additional decoration within doors, or sought employment outside in helping the little old man who worked in the garden when he was done with the stable. At first she had got this ancient to drive her in the pony-chaise—in his faded livery; but he was not very communicative; and she preferred being alone; and so she took to driving by herself—going considerable distances sometimes—and letting the cob walk for the most part. In this way she became very familiar with the not over-peopled neighbourhood surrounding her, with the Commons of Stoke and Leatherhead and Esher, with Fitcham Downs and Mickleham Downs, with Headley Heath and Walton Heath, and all the scattered little hamlets and nooks and byways to which she could gain access. It was a solitary life for a young woman to lead. Her ostensible object was the gathering of wild flowers for the adornment of the cottage parlour. The cob would stand patiently enough in the lanes, or on the open heath, while she explored the hedgerows or the broken sandpits. But sometimes she forgot this pursuit—oftenest when she had got up to some height from which she could look northwards across the wide, undulating, wooded country; and then she would remain there motionless, silent, absent-minded, until she felt helpless tears swimming into her eyes. For she was looking across that wide landscape to London town, where still she had one or two friends.

One day her solitude was broken in upon; for Mrs. Wygram, and Janie, and Janie's artist-sweetheart all came down to see her; and as this was the first time that Sabina had acted as hostess in her own home, she was very proud and pleased, and the excitement of seeing them brought quite a flush of animation to the pale and sad face. As for Janie (after one quick, nervous, anxious look of inquiry directed to Sabina's eyes), she declared that the little cottage was most charmingly pretty; the neighbourhood was delightfully picturesque; the air so sweet after London; the blossom on the fruit-trees so beautiful. She would go into the garden, and was interested in the smallest details; she went into the stable and patted the cob; she thought the little maidservant such a pretty-looking country lass. But when they had got indoors again, and when Sabina had gone away for a couple of minutes to superintend lunch, Janie said sharply, 'Philip, why do you stare at her so? I wish you wouldn't stare at her so!'

'I think she is more beautiful than ever,' he said absently. 'But it is a rarer kind of beauty—something finer—— Janie, I don't know why, but to me she hasn't the look of a happy woman.'

'Oh, don't say that, Phil!' Janie exclaimed. 'Don't say she isn't happy!' And then she fought with her own fears. 'Why, of course she is happy! What did you expect? You've seen Sabie before. She's not the giggling barmaid kind of person. Why shouldn't Sabie be reserved

and—and—and—refined—and—and quiet in manner? Did you expect her to giggle?'

'Janie!' the mother said; and the warning was only given in time; for just then Sabina made her appearance.

But surely this gentle hostess was not unhappy? as she sat there at the head of the table, smiling and talking to her friends, and rather bewildering the young artist with the graciousness of her look and address. He was accustomed to seek his inspiration from many sources; but he could not quite get at the secret here. Was it her eyes—that were so frank and generous and kind? Or was it the proud set of the head and neck—as she seemed to incline a little in order to listen to her next neighbour? Her shoulders and the lines of her throat were magnificent, he could see easily enough; but that was merely physical and obvious; that had nothing to do with the subtle charm and sweetness of her presence. Wherein lay the mystery, then? Was it her disposition? But a plain woman might have a beautiful disposition without possessing this nameless attraction. Or was it association? There was something in the Madonna-like forehead and in the calm of her eyes that seemed to suggest the ideals of the early Italian artists—the serene loveliness—the sadness, even, with which they had endowed their imaginings of the blessed among women. He thought he would like to have a look through the National Gallery. Janie would go with him; it would be a pleasant task for

her to seek out something resembling Sabina's expression in those visions and dreams of the painters of an earlier world.

After luncheon was over, Sabina took Mrs. Wygram away for a drive in the pony-chaise, considerately leaving the two young folks to go for a walk by themselves. And they had plenty to talk over—at least he had; for he was telling her of the various Italian cities he proposed they should visit on their approaching wedding-trip; and he was debating whether it was better to arrive at Venice at night or in the morning. Which was likely to be the more striking to her who had never been there at all—the hushed mysterious blackness of the canals and the gliding by of the hearselike and half-invisible gondolas; or the splendour of the dawn widening over the great lagoon, and making a wonder of the islands and the tall campanili and the domes and the palaces? He did not address his conversation to her direct; he talked as if he was looking at some one away along the road; perhaps that was the reason he did not perceive that Janie was paying him but scant attention. At last he said to her, 'Why are you silent? What are you thinking of?'

'I was thinking of one night at Walter Lindsay's,' Janie answered, with a sigh. 'Ah, if you had seen Sabie that night! I never saw her so—so radiant. But I suppose the world changes to every one.'

'Oh, as to that,' said he, 'I don't know that she has

changed so much for the worse. Of course I don't want to say anything against her, or else you'd be up in arms in a moment; but the Miss Zembra that I used to see sometimes—well, everybody could recognise her beauty—that was apparent enough—but I confess that she was just a little too straightforward in her manner for me. There was a kind of want of sensitiveness somehow that is difficult to explain; she was just a trifle too direct and frank——'

'She was a healthy and high-spirited young woman,' Janie said warmly, 'and very busy; with little time to study small details or think of what she was saying; but she was, always and always, just graciousness and goodness itself!'

'Oh yes,' he said. 'Yes, I suppose that was so. But I can't help thinking there is a finer touch about her now——'

'I suppose you think it is fine to be unhappy!' said Janie, rather bitterly. But she instantly drew back from that proposition—or rather, from the suspicion implied in it. 'Oh no, I hope she is not unhappy,' she said. 'Her husband seems to be away a great deal, certainly; and she may be feeling lonely there; but, you know, he is mad about horse-racing and such things; and as soon as he has run through the little money that he has, then he will be compelled to stop, and begin and live a more domestic life. In the meantime,' Janie added plaintively, 'if he doesn't want her, I wish he would give her to

us. Ah, wouldn't you like to see Sabie again in Kensington Square!'

Sabina seemed to be loth to part with her visitors that afternoon.

'You will come up for the wedding?' Janie said, shyly, as they stood together in the railway station.

'Oh yes; and for the Private View at the Grosvenor?' said the young artist, who seemed to consider these two events as of about equal importance to him.

'Sabie, do you remember the Private View at the Academy last year?'

There was no answer to the question, for the train came in just then; and presently these good people were on their way to London, and Sabina was slowly driving back to her solitary home.

Her next visitors were of another complexion. Fred Foster came back, of course, for the Epsom Spring Meeting; and as he was leaving on the first morning, he said to her, 'Most likely some of these fellows will be coming along to-night for a smoke and a drink, but that needn't bother you; you needn't put in an appearance unless you like. It was their own proposal; and I'm under obligations to Johnny Russell—I did not like to refuse——'

'But,' she said quickly, 'couldn't I get some dinner for them? I think I could manage.'

'Oh no,' he said impatiently. 'We shall dine at Epsom. And you needn't be afraid—Raby won't be one of them.'

'Shouldn't I have some supper for them, Fred?' she asked.

'No, no; it's drink they'll want; see that there's plenty of soda-water.'

Sabina said nothing more; but all the same she busied herself during the day in preparing for them a neat little supper, so that they might have it if they wished it; and long before they arrived it was all ready for them—a couple of cold fowls and some ham and salad, with bottled stout, and whisky and soda-water in the cupboard: there was no wine in the house. And she had a fire burning brightly; and there were clusters of wild flowers adorning the white table-cover; altogether this little apartment looked very neat and comfortable.

It was about nine o'clock when they arrived; she heard the noisy crew drive up to the gate. And then, amidst the tumult of their getting down, she could make out her husband's voice—and sulky enough it sounded.

'Hold your row, can't you? Do you want to make it out you're all drunk?'

'Keep your hair on, old man!' another said.

'You always were a bad loser, Freddie,' said a third; 'but I must say your luck to-day was awful, all the way through.'

And then as they got to the door one said, 'What is it to be? Crowns and pounds?'

But when they came inside a hush fell over them; and

they left their coats and hats in the passage quietly enough; and then, during their brief and rough-and-ready introduction to Sabina, their manner was most demure. Johnny Russell was the only one of them she knew; and he was quite deferential.

'Come along, now, into the other room,' Foster said; 'if I'm dead broke, I mean to have a drink anyway.'

'Won't you smoke here?' Sabina suggested. 'Later on you may want a little supper.'

'Oh no, we don't want any supper,' he said. 'Come along, you fellows.'

Being thus imperatively bidden, they followed him into the passage; the next moment the open door showed them the supper already laid on the table.

'Here, what's the use of this?' he said, turning to Sabina. 'I told you we shouldn't want any supper. Send the girl, and have the table cleared.'

'Oh, I say, Foster,' Johnny Russell at once protested, 'that is rather cool. If Mrs. Foster has been so kind as to mean this for us—well, I think you might give us the chance; what do you say?

He turned to the others.

'Yes, yes, certainly,' was the unanimous answer; but whether that was prompted by any wish for supper or as a compliment to their hostess may be a matter of doubt.

'Oh, very well—very well,' Foster said, and he went into the room.

Sabina remained for a second uncertain; whereupon Johnny Russell facetiously remarked, 'I think we shall be surer of our welcome when Mrs. Foster takes her place at the table.'

Sabina needed no further invitation; and when she sat down they were very kind and attentive to her; though she had to remind them that it was she who ought to wait upon them. And if, as is highly probable, they wanted no supper at all, still, out of courtesy, they pretended to be valiant trencher-men, and Sabina was highly pleased. Fred Foster was the only one who did not join in; perhaps it was his losses during the day that made him moody; at all events, he remained standing by the fire; and he had lit a cigar.

Supper over, and things cleared away by the little maid-servant, Sabina withdrew; and she knew, by the hilarity that speedily followed, that she had done right in leaving them free. This was not whist they were playing, she guessed; probably it was some round game, in which the ill-luck of the unfortunate was greeted with derision; anyhow, the noise did not disturb her; she read contentedly in the small drawing-room until (following an old habit about which Janie used to tease her) she quietly fell asleep. It was near midnight when she awoke; they were still playing, but less noisily; so leaving them to themselves, she slipped upstairs and went to bed.

But whatever game that was they had been playing, Fred

Foster had burned his fingers at it, as she discovered next morning.

'Those brutes didn't go till three,' he said. 'I hope their walk back to Epsom did them good. I know they managed to clean me out before they left.'

And then he said, 'Look here, Sabie, I've been pretty hard hit lately, in several ways. I think I must sell the cob and the pony-chaise.'

'To pay Mr. Deane?' she asked.

'Oh no. He's all right. He has got a bill for that. But I must get a bit of money somehow. And this would save old Noel's wages, and the keep of the cob besides.'

'Very well,' she said, without any word of remonstrance or regret.

But this sale of the cob and the pony-chaise—they were taken away a couple of days thereafter—left her life at the cottage even more monotonous and empty than it had been before. She worked a little in the garden; she read sometimes; she wrote to Janie, or to Mrs. Foster in Buckinghamshire, evading the old lady's pertinacious inquiries about the whereabouts and conduct of her son. But it was a lonely life; the hours went by slowly; there were long spaces for reverie, and recollections, and forecasts, which were not always of the happiest kind. But no word of complaint escaped her; whatever of despair was in her heart she kept concealed there; she sought for no sympathy. Sometimes, in a half-hysterical kind of way, she would

convince herself that her father would relent, and that a larger income would remove her husband's discontent and win him back to her; and she would go downstairs in the morning with some wild hope of finding a letter there with the joyful news. No such letter came. Sir Anthony's communications were punctual; beyond that, nothing. And so the slow days went by, each one laying a heavier hand upon her heart.

She did not go to the Private View of the Grosvenor, nor yet to Janie Wygram's wedding; but thereafter she got many and many a letter from Janie, describing their wanderings in Italy, and her joy over these new experiences. The young married couple were not away very long, though they managed to visit a good many places in the time; and Sabina began to count the days until their return, for somehow she wished to know that Janie was in London.

It was the second morning after they got back that Janie received the following note:—

'DEAR FRIEND—Do you remember one night at Mrs. Mellord's a Scotch girl singing a song that began something like this—

O can ye sew cushions,
And can ye sew sheets,
And can ye sing ballaloo
When the bairn greets?

Do you think you could get me a copy of it? You will try, for Sabie's sake.'

Just as fast as ever she could walk from Nottinghill to Kensington Square, Janie carried this note; and breathless and joyful she was when she put it into her mother's hand.

'See, mother,' she cried. 'Don't you understand?—it is a message! And oh, I am so glad! Poor Sabie—she will not be so lonely now.'

CHAPTER XXVII

IN NEW YORK

Walter Lindsay never even began the series of drawings of the River Shannon, the chief aim of which was that they should form a little exhibition by themselves, and so enable him to invite Sabina to the Private View. But after he had been a little while in America, the idea recurred to him of getting together a collection of consecutive studies of one particular neighbourhood; and finally he betook himself to the Adirondacks, remaining there all the winter and most of the spring, suffering a good deal of hardship at times, but working diligently nevertheless. When he returned to New York he brought with him a sufficient number of sketches and pictures to make a very creditable show in a room that he hired for the purpose; and if there was no formal Private View, many visitors dropped in in a casual kind of way; and the newspapers were kind enough to approve. The end of it was that a railway-king bought the entire collection—to be set into a series of panels in his smoking-room; thus leaving Lindsay free to renew his solitary wanderings.

But on the afternoon that saw this transaction completed,

he thought he would treat himself to a bit of a frolic later on; and so, being president of a small society going by the name of the Monks of St. Giles (he had borrowed the title of a club to which he had been introduced in Edinburgh), he issued a summons to the members to meet that night at twelve; and then he went to order supper for them at the hotel where they were wont to assemble. From thence he strolled along to a certain large theatre, where they were just then playing 'Romeo and Juliet'; passed in by the stage entrance; made his way through many intricate passages; and finally gained admission to a room in which Romeo and Tybalt—in perfect amity—were dressing for their respective parts.

'The Monks meet to-night; I thought I would make sure of you,' he said to Romeo.

'All right,' the hapless lover answered (for a wonder he was a perfectly ideal Romeo—young, slim, well-featured, well-mannered).

And then he turned to Tybalt—who, by the way, was as handsome as any Montague of them all.

'I say, Jack, you know we are not supposed to take any one with us, but I'll make it all right with the boys. Will you go as my guest? I'll lend you a cloak and hood.'

'I should like it immensely,' was the immediate answer.

'One good turn deserves another,' Romeo said, with a laugh. 'Jack, why don't you go and get a domino and mask, and we'll get Lindsay on in the ballroom scene?'

'What, on the stage?' cried the victim of this proposal.

'Why, of course! It will be quite a new experience for you. You're not afraid, are you? Even if you should be, that will be another experience. Stage-fright is a delicious thing—when it is over, and you begin to breathe again. Besides, no one will see you, if you keep your mask up.'

'But what am I to do?'

'Oh, anything you like. You can stand and talk to Lady Capulet. Or you may fan the nurse. Or walk about among the crowd. But you'd better not wander down the stage much; you might get in the way—and those Capulets are pretty quick with their weapons.'

'You may trust me not to wander one inch from the place I'm put in,' observed Walter Lindsay, with marked decision.

'You'll come off with the others of course,' his friend continued carelessly (indeed he was more intent on pencilling his eyebrows). 'And if you care to stay and see the rest of the play, you can sit in the first entrance; then we could all go down together to the Monks.'

Well, it was not only a new experience, it was an absolutely bewildering one. For no sooner had he donned the long blue domino, with its belt and dagger, and taken the scarlet mask in his hand, than he was led on the stage and placed by the side of Lady Capulet's chair of state; and then it seemed to him as if he were lost in ungovernable chaos. How was this turbulent, amorphous crowd, with its

picturesque costumes and visors and weapons, ever to fall into the regulated harmony of a ballroom? The air was thick with warnings, calls, and cries; his efforts to converse with the Lady Capulet were of the most inconsequent kind. But presently there was a sound slow and melodious; a hush fell over the varied throng; and as the raising of the curtain revealed to him a vast space beyond this ballroom in which he stood—a space dusky and dim and huge, and filled with orange-hued masses of what were apparently human beings—he found that these figures near him were gliding through the gentle movements of a minuet, while a chorus of voices somewhere kept time with the strains of the music. Curiously enough, he was not concerned about the audience in the least. To him they were non-existent. They were eyeless, as it were. Why should he heed those distant and dusky rows of inanimate objects that he could scarce make out? It was here, in this actual and living throng, that all his interests were; and it was strange to be one of them—to be in the midst of them—not the remote spectator of a theatrical display—but standing amongst the guests in the glare and gorgeousness of a ballroom in a house in Verona. The whole thing became marvellously and unaccountably real. There was the Lady Juliet. Well, he had the honour of a slight acquaintance with the young lady who was then playing the part, having met her in one or two social circles in New York; but now he forgot all about that; surely this was the real Juliet in her father's

home, observed of all, and charming all with her youthful and radiant beauty, her dignity, her gentle courtesy. A few minutes before he had been up in his friend's dressing-room, chatting to him, watching the buckling on of his rapier, and thinking mostly about the Monks of St. Giles; but he forgot all about that too; surely this was the real Romeo—the love-lorn, ill-fated youth—here in this ballroom—in Verona—whose vibrant voice now thrilled through the half-silenced music—

> *'Oh she doth teach the torches to burn bright!*
> *Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night*
> *Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;*
> *Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!'*

But this was only the beginning of his bewilderment; for by and by, when the minuet was over, the Lady Juliet was free to move among her father's bidden guests, bestowing here and there a gracious word or smile; and to his amazement he found she was approaching him.

'Good evening, Mr. Lindsay,' she said. 'Oh, you need not be afraid. No one can recognise you. Jack told me who you were.'

'But I *am* afraid—horribly afraid,' he said.

'Of what?'

'Of getting in the way, or doing something wrong——'

'No, no,' she said; and then she added with a touch of gentle malice, 'Won't you walk down the stage with me? Will you give me your arm?'

'Oh no, thank you, I'd rather not,' was the instant and anxious answer. 'I feel safe where I am, thank you very much.'

And surely this was the strangest and most dazing and puzzling scene that any human being ever found himself in, whether in Verona or New York, or anywhere else? Here is what his distracted ears were listening to—including his own voice; while his eyes would keep wandering from the Lady Juliet to her watchful cousin and her more magnanimous father—

Tybalt—Now, by the stock and honour of my kin, To strike him dead I hold it not a sin.

Capulet—Why, how now, kinsman, wherefore storm you so?

Tybalt—Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe, A villain that is hither come in spite, To scorn at our solemnity this night.

The Lady Juliet—Surely, Mr. Lindsay, you do not think that any one can recognise you?

Walter Lindsay—Not hitherto; but now all their opera-glasses are levelled at you; and supposing I were to drop my mask by accident, what then?

Tybalt—It fits, when such a villain is a guest. I'll not endure him!

Capulet—He shall be endured! What, goodman boy! I say he shall. Go to!

The Lady Juliet—I hear you are going to take Jack to some club to-night. Don't let him sit up too late.

Walter Lindsay—Oh, I will look after him. But he doesn't need looking after. Your brother Jack is a very good boy.

Tybalt—Why, uncle, 'tis a shame!

Capulet—Go to! Go to!

The Lady Juliet—Well, I will say good-night now, Mr. Lindsay, for I shan't see you again this evening. I don't like seeing people after playing *Juliet.* Good-night!

Walter Lindsay (remembering his part, and bowing gravely)—Addio, signorina.

On the whole, however, he was more content when the slow procession filed off the stage; and when they found for him a corner from which he could look on at the ever-beautiful balcony scene. And even here, standing in the 'wings,' amongst gasmen and carpenters and scene-shifters, it was still that magic night in Verona that was all around him; and it was not the young lady he had met in New York society that he saw before him; but Juliet her very self, in all her impassioned tenderness, now startled and coy and timid, now generously confiding and bountiful in her love, and in her maiden charms

More beautiful than whom Alcæus wooed,
The Lesbian woman of immortal song!

Nay, so much was he impressed with the reality of the scene, that when Romeo, having uttered his last farewell, came out of that moonlit garden, Lindsay, from some kind of delicacy, let him go by without speaking, and did not

follow him to his dressing-room. On the contrary, he merely sent him a message to say that he did not wish to stay the performance out, but would come back for those two when it was over; and then he wandered forth into the busy streets of New York. To tell the truth, he rather wanted to make this a frolicsome night; and even a winter in the Adirondacks had not wholly hardened up the sensitiveness of his artist's temperament; very well he knew that the tragic spectacle of Juliet's unnumbered woes was not the best beginning for a merry evening.

And indeed, as it turned out, this midnight meeting of the Monks proved to be a very gay affair, when each had donned his cloak and hood of sober gray, and taken his place at the sumptuously-furnished table. At first there was no kind of order in the proceedings; the business of supper had to be got through with; quips and jests and anecdotes of more or less doubtful veracity were bandied about anyhow; and, as the wine flowed, there was abundant laughter found for even a fish story. But when the supper things had been removed, and cigars lit, the president from time to time tinkled his bell for silence; and in the pauses those who were able and willing joined in this or that old English glee—'Dame Durden,' 'Calm be thy Slumbers,' 'Ye Spotted Snakes,' 'Here in Cool Grot,' and so forth. Likewise there were many plantation choruses; one especially being a favourite; for as each Monk had to improvise a verse—no matter what—there was abundant

occasion for all kinds of personalities, the sting of which, of course, disappeared, or was drowned rather, in the universal chorus of 'Balm of Gilead, Gilead!' It was a very careless and merry gathering; but the climax of these festivities was neither careless nor merry. At a quarter to two the lights were lowered. Each Monk drew forward his cowl and sat with downcast head. And then, in the hushed silence, a powerful baritone began to sing—slowly and with clear enunciation—that grimmest and weirdest of all the Scotch ballads, 'The Twa Corbies,' while after each couplet the whole of the company took up the fantastic and mournful refrain. It was the old air, which is curiously pathetic in its simplicity, that was sung; and scarcely less gruesome than the words themselves—

'And nae ane kens that he lies there
But his hawk and his hound and his lady fair,

was the slow-chanted burden that followed—

'With a fal, lal lal, lal lal, lal lay,
With a fal, lal lal, lal lay.'

And then, when the tragic story was ended—

'Mony's the ane for him makes mane,
But nane shall ken where he is gane;
Owre his white banes, when they are bare,
The wind shall blaw for evermair.'

And when the last deep-sounding, mournful notes,

'With a fal, lal lal, lal lal, lal lay,
With a fal, lal lal, lal lay,'

had died into silence, they rose from the table; the lights were turned up; cloaks and hoods put aside; and—somewhat sobered by this mystic rite—the Monks were free to go their several ways home.

Walter Lindsay, however, had rooms in this same hotel; and so, when the last of his friends had gone, he retired thither, drew in a chair to the fire, that was still burning, and took from his pocket a letter. It had come that morning; it was from Janie; and although there was a good deal in it about her husband and their travels in Italy, the bulk of it (as of yore) was all about Sabina; and this was what he wanted to read over again, in seclusion and peace.

'Sometimes we were amused, sometimes we were a little ashamed of ourselves,' the ever-faithful Janie wrote, 'to find how often the same idea was in our head in going through those picture-galleries. When we went into a new room we almost invariably made first for the most prominent Madonna subject. Philip would stand looking at it for some time. "Very curious; none of them quite seem to have her expression. There's something about those eyebrows a little like." Then I (in sweet simplicity): "But who is it you are thinking of, Phil?" "Oh, you know well enough. As if your beloved Sabie was ever for a moment out of your head! And of course I've got to think of her sometimes—so as not to feel lonely; you can't always be wandering away by yourself." But really it was he who

began it, even before we were married, for he took me to the National Gallery, and we went over all the Madonnas carefully, but not one would do. This one was too cold and wooden; the other simpering, and so forth. Nor did we get on any better abroad. There's one in the Louvre, the *Vierge aux rochers*, that has something of the calm look of Sabie's forehead, but her hair is more *crimpled* than Sabie's; and then you remember there is always a little trickiness in the smile of that woman that Leonardo used to paint. The most beautiful one we saw, "The Assumption," in Venice—yes, that was very beautiful—but it was quite different from Sabie. She is so much more human, to my fancy; and looks at you so straight. But if we failed before, you may imagine whether we are likely to succeed now. Phil and I went down the other day. Dear friend, I wish you could see her, if but for a moment. There is a look in her face that was never there before, even in the old days when she was at her happiest. I think she had quite given herself over to despair—though she would never complain—and I never wrote much to you about it, for I had not the heart to do so; but now that she finds there is some consolation for her, and some call for her love and sympathy, and a constant interest in her lonely life, she seems overcome with a kind of wondering gratitude. If you could only see her stooping over the little bed where the child lies, and see the happiness in her face, and her delight in showing you all the little bits of finery

and lace that she has made with her own fingers, you would understand how deeply, deeply thankful we all are that something has happened to make her life a little more bearable. Poor Sabie! Who could ever have thought that this would be the end—living almost alone in a cottage away from all her friends? But in spite of all her shrewdness and high spirits, she was always romantically generous; it was invariably "Give, give" with her; and so to make up for a trumpery accident, she gave herself! That's what I call it: and many a time my heart was very sore about it, when I saw the result, though I did not tell you everything; but now I am glad to write and say that she is a little happier. She laughed once or twice the last time we were there—it's such a long time since I heard our poor Sabie laugh. When baby gets a little older, Phil is going to ask a friend of his who is a very skilled photographer to go down and take a group of mother and child; and if it turns out well, be sure you will have a copy if you care to have it; and as for me, I know I shall far and away prefer it to any of the Madonnas we saw abroad.

'We keep the house and studio as neat and pretty as we can, and occasionally have a few friends; and often enough, when I see them seated at the table, I think of the night that Sabie came to your supper party, and looked so pretty as she sat next to you. I wonder if you remember the Indian silk dress, and the *fichu* of yellow lace,

and the forget-me-nots! Poor Sabie, there are no more of such nights for her now.'

That was all that Janie had to report at present. And if it never occurred to her that she was doing a remarkably ingenuous thing in writing out to Walter Lindsay to inform him that Mr. Fred Foster had been presented with a son—well, that did not occur to Lindsay either. It was as Sabie's child that both of them regarded this newcomer; Janie rejoiced to see that at last some measure of happiness had been meted out to one whose life had of late been loveless enough; Lindsay wondering in a vague sort of way whether Sabina had ever heard of the pet name that the Highland mother has for her infant—'the lamb of my heart.' But his thoughts and fancies went far further afield. During those solitary months in the Adirondacks he had been a good deal given to looking into the future, with no kind of despair or discontent whatever, but rather with a curious apathy. The long, forthcoming years looked empty somehow, and not very interesting: that was all. But with this letter of Janie's lying on his knee—and as he sat far into the morning, with the fire in the grate slowly dwindling down—other pictures began to form themselves. Strangely enough, neither Fred Foster nor Sabina was there; he had forgotten them, he did not see them. But he saw a young lad, tall for his age, and fair, with clear brown eyes, and a bright and gracious smile; and he saw himself, grave and grizzled and elderly, and yet half-admiring the lad's audacity

and foolish opinions, walking by his side. This was in Galloway. They had fishing-rods in their hands. And if the tall, proud-featured, but gentle-lipped youth had been talking wilful perversity in politics, now he was all meek submission as his elderly companion began to select flies for him, and show him where were the likely casts in the stream. And not in Galloway alone (though the boy would know that he was heir to a little estate in that county). Might not Mentor and Telemachus—always with their rods and fly-books accompanying them—enjoy many devious and distant wanderings, with lunch on the loch-side or the river-bank, and evenings before the fire in the cosy room of the inn?

'Nay, spring I'd meet by Tweed or Ail,
And summer by Loch Assynt's deep,
And autumn in that lonely vale
Where wedded Avons westward sweep.

Or where, amid the empty fields,
Among the bracken of the glen,
Her yellow wreath October yields
To crown the crystal brows of Ken.'

The elder of these two inseparable companions—whom he saw in those visionary pictures—was himself. And the other? Well, the lad had Sabina's eyes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN AMBASSADOR

Mr. Fred Foster was going down home by the ten o'clock train from Waterloo; and he had for companion a big, heavy, red-faced, good-natured-looking man, who seemed in much better spirits than his neighbour.

'No, no, Freddy, take my advice, and never back yourself at billiards unless you're ahead, and in fairly good luck. You can't play a losing game a bit; and bad luck drives you wild. Why, man, you can't ram the balls into the pockets if they won't go. Temper won't do it, my lad.'

'And I suppose you wouldn't get out of temper if you were playing with a cad like that?' was the retort. 'I never saw such a sneak in all my life. His sole notion of the game was to pot the white and get double baulk.'

'When a man thinks he's going to land a tidy little twenty-five pounds, he doesn't play to the gallery,' observed Mr. John Scott, sententiously. 'Well, well, old chap, cheer up. It will be a lesson to you. You know you were just a little bit too eager to touch that young man's chinks. A pony to a fiver, and thirty-five points in two hundred, that's

not good biz. That's not billiard-betting at all unless you were to bar flukes. In a nomination game it might do; but with all the chances of luck against you, I'd be awful sure of my play before I backed myself at five to one.'

'The sneak wouldn't bet at all without ridiculous odds —that's what it was,' Foster said, rather morosely. 'And if he had played a fair game, I should have won easily. Why, I'd lay him £100 to £10 to-morrow, and give him 200 in 1000—to-morrow morning I'd do it!'

'Yes,' said the other, drily, 'but I think he has had enough. I think he will be quite content when he has got that twenty-five pounds in his trousers' pocket.'

'He hasn't got it there yet, then,' Foster said gloomily, 'and I don't see how he is to get it just at present. My luck for the last four months has just been awful. It was the scratching of Theology for the Liverpool Cup that began it—the most infernal swindle ever done on the turf that was —I am certain of it—a deliberate swindle; well, ever since that, every mortal thing has gone against me—every mortal thing. I seem to Jonah everything I touch.'

'Take my advice and keep your noddle cool, then,' Mr. Scott said pleasantly. 'I know you, Fred, my lad. When they get you in a corner, you are inclined to put down your head and butt. But that's not the way to play the great game. No, no, keep cool; and bide your chance.'

'There's an awful amount of advice about this evening,' Foster was goaded into saying. 'Very kind of you, I am

sure, Mr. Scott. Perhaps you wouldn't mind also lending me a pony for a week or two, to settle up with that sneak?'

The suggestion was merely a bit of sarcasm, but Mr. Scott took it blandly enough.

'My dear boy,' he said, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, 'didn't I tell you what they did to me at Shrewsbury? If King of Tralee hadn't pulled off the Shropshire Handicap I should have had to come home on shanks mare.'

Mr. Scott left the train at Epsom; Foster went on to Witstead. At the little station only one other passenger got out—a gentleman of the neighbourhood, who jauntily stepped into his lamp-lit brougham, and was rapidly driven away, leaving his fellow-traveller to find his way home on foot. The night was pitch dark; the air thick, with a cold raw drizzle; the roads heavy with mire; and as Fred Foster had to exercise the utmost caution to prevent his stumbling into the ditch, his reflections were none of the most genial kind.

'Sir Anthony Zembra at the Mansion House—great oration—generous appeal—cheque for five hundred guineas—cheers. Sir Anthony Zembra entertains Prime Minister at Waldegrave Club—proceedings strictly private. Sir Anthony Zembra arrived at the Castle, and had the honour of dining, etc. Yes; and Sir Anthony Zembra's son-in-law finds himself slouching along a muddy country lane, like a

tramp in search of a night's lodging, with precious little prospect of supper before him.'

Nor were his meditations much enlivened by the appearance of Wayside Cottage when eventually he arrived there. All the lower windows were dark. In one of the upper windows there was the faintest yellow tinge; probably a night-light was burning in the room. So he knocked and rang, knocked and rang, until a sharper light appeared there; and then he waited; and by and by Sabina herself, wrapped from head to foot in a large shawl, and bearing a candle in her hand, opened the door for him.

'What is the use of going to bed in the middle of the day?' he asked surlily, as he entered.

'It is past eleven,' was the mild answer; 'but I would have waited up any time if I had known you were coming.'

'Fire out, I suppose,' he said, as he preceded her into the little dining-room.

Unmistakably it was out.

She lit the two lamps on the sideboard; and said she was sorry she had not known he was coming; but would she get him some supper? She could easily do that without waking the girl.

'Has that cheque come down to-day?' he asked.

'No; it is only due to-day; I suppose it will come to-morrow,' she answered; and then she added rather piteously, 'But, Fred, surely you do not want any of that money!'

For she owed some small sums in Epsom. But that was not all. The baby was now old enough to be promoted from a cradle to a cot; and she had seen a very neat-looking one in Epsom; and she had looked forward to the patient adornment of it by her own hands as a welcome labour of love in the slow hours. Nay, she had even procured the materials for the purpose; and had foreshadowed the most cunning little elegancies; and had designed, in old English letters, a scroll to hang at the head of it—

Gute Nacht, du süsses Kind,
Mögen Engel dich behüten,
Und der Schlummer leis und lind,
Streue dir die schönsten Blüthen.

And she had promised herself the happiness of purchasing this cot as soon as the cheque from her father arrived; it was an extravagance, she knew; but she had set her heart on it.

'Why, of course I want some of it!' he said sharply. 'I wish you knew the straits I am in. I suppose you wouldn't mind if I were locked up in Holloway Gaol?'

'Oh, Fred, don't talk that way,' she entreated. 'Don't let us quarrel about nothing. See, there is a letter on the mantelpiece—from Buckinghamshire—there is bad news—your mother is not well.'

This brought him to his senses in an instant.

'It came four days ago,' she said, as he went to the fireplace.

'Then why didn't you send it to me?'

'You know I hadn't your address,' she said—but by this time he was wholly engrossed with the contents of the letter.

It was written by old Mr. Foster; and the animus of the old gentleman against his son was clearly shown by the fact that the latter was not mentioned or referred to in any way whatsoever. It was all a prayer that Sabina and her child should go and live with the old people, who would do everything in their power to make her comfortable. This entreaty was sent at the earnest request of Mrs. Foster, who could not herself write just then, as she was ill and in bed. The long-continued cold and wet had affected her general health; a bad cough had supervened on that; and it was feared her lungs were more or less affected. Still, no immediate alarm was felt; only the old lady seemed anxiously to wish to know that her daughter was near her, as she said; and she sent many and many kindly messages. Finally, would Sabina at once send a telegram in reply? It would give Mrs. Foster great pleasure to hear that she was coming; and they would begin to make preparations to receive her.

'Of course it's impossible,' Fred Foster rather impatiently said. 'I'm not going to live down there—unless the writters make it too hot for me to live anywhere else.'

And then he said more gently, 'I *should* like to run down and see how the Mater is, if it wasn't for the expense.'

'Oh, Fred,' Sabina said, 'why should that hinder you? The money will be here to-morrow—by the mid-day post at latest. Of course you must go and see your mother.'

'No,' he said, somewhat sulkily. 'No, I don't want any of that money. I can do without it. You keep it.'

'But really I can do without the whole of it,' Sabina said —for she was a generous-hearted kind of creature. 'Really I can. I have a few bills to pay; and then I thought of buying baby a cot——'

'Why? Isn't the cradle good enough?' he said, turning to her.

'They say a cot is healthier. But baby can wait,' Sabina said cheerfully. 'There's not much the matter with his health, the dear.'

'Well, go to your bed now. I'm going to smoke a pipe —and consider the best way of keeping out of gaol.'

So Sabina went away, sincerely hoping that he would go down to Missenden on the morrow; for he was always more considerate to her, and more reasonable, and a little less selfish, when he had been even for the briefest space under his mother's roof.

But the next morning his mood had changed—as frequently happened with him.

'The old man has been pitching it strong about the Mater's health,' he said, 'in order to get you to promise to go down. Oh, I know his games. He has done that before with me. I should like to hear more definite news before going away down there, and spending money on a wild-goose chase. By the way, I think I shall have to ask you for a fiver out of that cheque if it comes to-day.'

'Very well, Fred.' And then she said, 'Just look at baby; I think he's going to be an artist. It is quite extraordinary the fascination that anything with colours on it has for him. From the very first he wouldn't look at the silver mug that Janie gave him; but that one is his favourite plaything. Fancy Mr. Lindsay taking all the trouble to have that made in America and sent over.'

'If you had any common sense, you would lock it away in a drawer,' he said briefly. 'A pretty catch for a thief, that, with all those stones.'

The cheque did not come by the first post, so he had to kick his heels about the house, waiting for the second. On one occasion, when Sabina came into the room, she found him reading over again the letter she had shown him the previous night. He threw it on to the table contemptuously.

'It's pretty clever,' he said.

'What is?'

'The proposal that you should go down and live at Missenden. Very ingenious that is; quite worthy of the old boy.'

'But I don't understand, Fred.'

'They get you down there; and expect me to go too. Either I do or I don't. If I don't—as I certainly shouldn't—he cuts off my allowance; that's what he's after; and there's so much saved. But if I were to go, then we should only cost them what we ate and drank in the house—cheap, you know.'

'Oh, Fred, why should you look at it like that!' Sabina protested. 'Isn't it natural they should wish us to go and live with them—especially if your mother is not well, and perhaps a little anxious and fretting? Anyway, what am I to telegraph?'

'What is the use of telegraphing?' he said. 'Write and say it is impossible.'

However, neither letter nor telegram was necessary. Scarcely had Sabina left the room when Fred Foster heard some one at the little gate outside, and, turning, saw to his quick alarm that it was his father. Instantly he went to the door and opened it.

'How is mother?' he asked breathlessly.

The old gentleman, at least, was in no hurry. He even seemed unwilling to speak to his son.

'She is just about the same,' he said, coldly, as he passed into the hall. 'I suppose Sabina is at home.'

'Yes, I'll fetch her.'

The old man went into the dining-room, put his umbrella in a corner, and his wideawake on the table, but he kept on his Inverness cape when he sat down. He was looking around him with no very amiable expression; perhaps he had not expected to find his son at home. However, his face brightened a little when Sabina came into the room; and he gave her some more definite particulars about Mrs. Foster's condition.

'You got my letter?' he asked.

'Oh yes, but I could not telegraph until Fred came home.'

'Oh, he has been away—that was it,' the old man said. 'I thought it strange. And—and as I had some business with my lawyers in London, it occurred to me that I might as well run down and take back the answer myself.'

It was a pretty lame excuse for this sudden and unannounced visit, the real object of which was obvious enough.

'Well, and how long does your husband propose to continue this folly?' he asked, looking round the room.

'If you mean living in this house,' said Fred Foster, with a levity which was dangerously ill-timed, 'I assure you I couldn't get a cheaper one anywhere, for I haven't paid a farthing for it.'

'Then you owe money for it—that you expect me to pay?' the old man said, turning sharply to his son; and Sabina, fearing what might ensue, thought she could not do better than fly away quickly and get baby made presentable and bring him down to act as peacemaker.

Indeed, she had not been many minutes in the room, her fingers as busy as ever they could with the adornment of her precious charge, when she could hear pretty plainly that there was a battle-royal raging below. Now there was no gentle-eyed mother to interpose between these two; and it was clear from the beginning that the old man had come down in a suspicious and resentful mood against his son. Moreover, she guessed that the father must have thrown

out some unusually bitter taunts, for it was not customary with Fred Foster to get angry. He was too selfish and indifferent for that. He could sulk, but ordinarily he would not take the trouble to storm. And when at last she was enabled to hurry downstairs—the voices ceased as she opened the door—it was clear that Fred Foster no longer wore any mask of levity; he was standing with his back to the window, but even with his face in shadow, her swift glance told her he was scowling, angry, and tight-lipped.

She drew in a chair close to the old man, so that the wonderful baby might be properly admired.

'Isn't he growing a big boy?' she said proudly.

'I have a little present for him from his grandmother,' Mr. Foster said, and he took out from his purse a carefully-folded £10 bank-note. 'This is to go into the Post-Office Savings Bank in his own name, she says, and you are to add a little when you can; and then when he grows up a bit he will be able to buy himself a pony.'

Of course Sabina thanked the old gentleman; and made believe that baby understood all that was being arranged for him, and was, indeed, quite an interested party.

'Do you remember, perhaps,' Mr. Foster continued—and he looked at his daughter-in-law with a little hesitation—'the corner room at the end of the passage—overlooking the greenhouses?'

'Oh yes, perfectly,' she answered.

'We were thinking—my wife was thinking—that might do for a nursery—if you were coming to live with us.'

'Yes?' Sabina said: what more could she say?

The old man paused for a second or two.

'What answer am I to take back?' he asked. 'May I say that we are to expect you?'

Sabina involuntarily turned to her husband.

'Oh, you may do as you like,' Fred Foster said curtly. 'I'm not going to live in Missenden. I can't afford it.'

'You can't afford it—but you can afford to keep up this separate house!' the old man retorted; but he would say no more; Sabina was there.

He turned to her.

'What do you say, my dear?' he asked very gently.

'I am sure Fred would like to go and see his mother—will you tell her that he will come and see her?' Sabina said timidly.

'But that is not it,' the old man said plainly. 'Surely you must understand that it is for your own sake as much as for ours that we want to see you settled down into a quiet, respectable life. We offer you a home. We will do our best to make you comfortable. If the ways of the house don't suit you, we will alter them. I don't think you will find us unkind or inconsiderate. I daresay my wife would say more to you, but you see she is ill, and cannot come to ask you herself; and what I have said is perhaps badly said—only I would rather see my daughter-

in-law in a settled home than moving from place to place in furnished lodgings.'

It was a cruel position for her to be placed in; for the offer was meant in all kindness; but she did not hesitate.

'You have heard what Fred said, sir,' she answered calmly. 'And of course I must remain with my husband.'

'That is your final decision?'

Her eyes were bent to the ground; and it was in rather a low voice—for she knew to what she was condemning herself—that she said, 'Yes.'

He rose then.

'But don't go yet,' she pleaded. 'Won't you stay and have some lunch with us?'

'No, thank you; I must try and get back to Missenden to-night.'

As he was leaving the room—he did not even bid good-bye to his son—he said to Sabina, 'Come here, I want to speak with you.'

She followed him into the passage, where he opened the door for himself.

'Mind, child, I have no quarrel with you,' he said, in a very different voice from that he had used in the room. 'Whatever we can do for your good, we will do. It was that that brought me here to-day.'

'But don't quarrel with Fred, either,' she pleaded earnestly. 'Indeed, he speaks the truth. He has been

so used to an active life—here and there—that it is hardly a wonder he shrinks from tying himself down to Missenden all at once. Perhaps he might get more familiar with the idea by and by. Or he might try it for a time. But don't part with him in anger.'

'I have nothing further to say on that head,' the old man said somewhat coldly. 'Except this, that I don't choose to support him any longer in idleness. I thought when he married there would be a change. There is no change—except for the worse, as far as I can see. My patience is out. From this day he will not touch a penny of my money—it is simply monstrous that in hard times like these, when farms are going a-begging, we should be supplying him with money for horse-racing and gambling. No, from this day, the allowance we have hitherto made him shall be paid—but into your hands, for the support of yourself and your household. That is settled. So good-bye, and God bless you, my child. I'll have a lot of questions to answer about the baby.'

Sabina, when she returned to the room, did not say anything about this decision on the part of the old gentleman, for she thought that it was perhaps merely a threat—the temporary result of impatience and anger. As for Fred Foster, he seemed to take his father's visit very coolly.

'Somebody has been telling him a pack of lies about

me, that's what it is,' he said. 'And didn't I tell you he was pitching it strong about the Mater's illness?—of course, if she had been so very ill, he would not have come all the way here. And the story about his lawyers—very good! I know why he came down in that sudden fashion; it was to spy out the land. Wonder if he expected to find a wild carnival going on—fountains spouting champagne—and Nautch girls lolling about on marble steps. Doesn't look like it somehow.'

With the second post came the looked-for cheque; and when Sabina had signed it, he put it in his pocket, saying he would get it cashed in London, and send her down the balance after retaining the five pounds.

'Five pounds,' he said, as he leisurely put on his overcoat and brushed his hat; 'it isn't a large sum to set about the retrieving of your fortunes with. I daresay some fellows could work it out into £500 or £5000 before the end of the year, but that doesn't seem to be my line at present.'

'Are you going back to London already?' she asked—but with no reproach in her tone.

'I suppose one must try to do something,' he said carelessly: the cheque in his pocket was in some small degree comforting.

And then he said, 'Look here, you don't really mean to bury that ten-pound note in the savings bank? What nonsense that is! Our circumstances are not suggestive of

opening bank accounts. What are you going to do with it?'

'Fred,' she said, looking at him, 'you wouldn't touch *that?* It's from your mother. It's for baby.'

He pulled himself together.

'No, no; that's all right. Go and bury it in the savings bank, if you like. Though the pony seems to me a long way off.'

By and by he left for the station, and Sabina was once more in solitary possession of the house. Yet not quite solitary either. She went up to her room; the baby was in its cradle and asleep. Perhaps the sound of her foot on the stairs, perhaps the opening of the door, had disturbed the child, but he moved a little as she crept forward on tiptoe; and presently she was kneeling down beside him, quieting him with velvet fingers, and crooning over him—but so gently that she could scarce hear her own voice—the song that Janie had got for her—

'O can ye sew cushions,
And can ye sew sheets,
And can ye sing ballaloo
When the bairn greets?
And hie and baw birdie,
And hie and baw lamb,
And hie and baw birdie,
My bonnie wee lamb.'

She liked this song—its old-fashioned words and pathetic air. But when she was hushing the child to sleep—or

walking about with him in her arms—and even when she was at her loneliest, with her heart at times pretty heavy within her—she did not make the plaintive air too sad. For well she knew that it is not when the mother cries that the babe smiles.

CHAPTER XXIX

TOO LATE!

'I SUPPOSE you would like me to pawn my wife's wedding-ring?'

It was Fred Foster who spoke in this hurt way; and it was his friend Jim Deane whom he addressed. But all the usual good-humour was absent now from Mr. Deane's small, ferrety, clear eyes, and from the weather-pinched face, with its lined features and small neat whiskers. For there was no Sabina present to mollify his manner. Rather he seemed to be following his wife's brisk counsel of the year before—that he should no longer submit to Foster's superior airs; and indeed at this moment his expression was far from being placable. The two men were in a small apartment at the top of a house in Wellington Street, Strand, which now constituted Fred Foster's lodging when he had to stay in town of a night.

'Pawn it or sell it, that don't concern me,' was the retort. 'But what I want you to understand is that I am not going to go on renewing that bill every three months. Mind, I don't like the look of the transaction at all. I

don't think it would sound well in court. You take over a horse and trap; give a bill for the amount; then you sell them; but instead of taking up the bill when it is due, it appears that you stuffed the money into your own pocket and spent it. Well, now, you know——'

'Oh, what's the use of talking like that?' Foster impatiently broke in. 'You would have had the money long ago if I hadn't struck such a cursed vein of ill-luck. Just look at Altcar last week. Did you ever see such luck? Shrapnell breaking her leg, and Tricksy Kitty and The Lad coming to grief almost immediately after. How can you expect any one to be in funds?'

'And there is that house,' continued the other. 'You have been in it all this time, and not one penny of rent paid! Well, I can't afford to find people in furnished houses all for nothing.'

'You've come to town in a pretty temper, Jim,' Foster remarked coolly. 'Why, I took over the house and the things to oblige you—you wanted to be off to Newmarket in such a hurry.'

'To oblige me?' Mr. Deane repeated. 'Well, you'll oblige me by clearing out; that's all I've got to say. I'll forfeit the rent up till now, but I don't mean to be made a fool of any longer.'

'Why, man, do you think you could let the house at this time of the year?'

'That is my affair.'

'Come, be reasonable, Jim,' Foster said in more conciliatory tones. 'You know very well that I always meant to pay you, and mean it now. It isn't like you to be hard on a fellow who is down on his luck; and the luck I've experienced of late would melt the heart of a grindstone. Anybody deader broke than I am at the present moment I can't imagine. But it won't last—it can't last. Just give me till Sandown Grand Prize and then you'll see.'

Deane's small eyes brightened up a little.

'What are you on—Victory or Cherry-band?'

'Cherry-band.'

'Cherry-band is a very good horse,' he remarked slowly.

'I got on him at 8 to 1,' Foster said, with some cheerfulness.

'And what do you stand to win, if it's a fair question?' the other asked.

'Well, I put everything I could scrape together on him, every scrap; but you may suppose it wasn't millions. Why, that's been the worst of my luck; when I have pulled off a good thing there's been nothing on worth speaking of.'

'Cherry-band is a good horse over the sticks,' Deane said, contemplatively.

'We'll go across to the Gaiety bar,' said Foster, perceiving that Mr. Deane had grown more amenable, 'and drink his good health. It's Cherry-band has got to pull me through.'

When they were over the way, Foster, whose tempera-

ment could move from one extreme to another with remarkable facility, said to his companion, 'Look here, Jim, I'm so certain of this thing coming all right that I'll tell you what I'll do with you—here, now, at this very counter. If you are worrying about the rent of the house, I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll get paper and ink and write down to my wife, directing her to send you a certain sum every month out of the household money. You may depend it will be paid, for she's as methodical as clockwork; and so is her precious prig of a father, too, although I believe he would prefer to see us both starving. Now will that do? And how much is it to be?'

Mr. Deane looked somewhat uneasy.

'N—no, I don't think I will trouble Mrs. Foster,' he said, with some hesitation. 'Business is business, of course, but I prefer dealing with men.'

'Then you are content to wait to see what Wednesday does for me?'

'Y—yes.'

'Now,' Foster continued boldly, 'will you lend me a tenner to put on Cherry-band?'

'No, I will not,' Deane said, with much sharpness. 'Why, you're out of your senses!'

'It's always the way,' Foster said, plaintively, 'when I've got hold of a real good thing, a moral, it always happens just then that I am out of funds, and lose my chance.'

'And what if Cherry-band shouldn't pull it off?' his companion said, eyeing him.

Foster laughed in a curious kind of way.

'We'd better not speak about that.'

It was in the interval between this conversation and the Sandown Park Meeting that Fred Foster learned for the first time that henceforth his father meant to forward his quarterly allowance to Sabina; in fact, it was on one of his occasional visits to Wayside Cottage that the cheque arrived, payable to her order. And he chose to be very angry about the circumstance, despite her remonstrances.

'What difference will it make?' she said. 'You will get the money all the same.'

'Why did you hide it from me all this time that he had spoken to you about it?' he asked, roughly enough.

'I—I did not hide it. I thought perhaps it was only a threat,' she said. 'Indeed I had no wish that he should do anything of the kind.'

'He thinks he can twist you round his finger. Wants you to go to Missenden! Oh yes. I wonder what he will try next. Anyhow, this cheque comes in handy enough, for I'm off to Sandown to-morrow—so you'd bettter sign it now.'

'But, Fred, you don't mean to take the whole of it away with you,' she pleaded.

'Oh, you needn't imagine I am going to risk all of it on horses,' he said. 'There's something more immediate

than that. The Collinsons have a writ out against me—the contemptible cads!—and I must get it squared. That comes of doing people a kindness. I wonder how many people I have got to try their champagnes—without a farthing of commission. But every one's hand is turned against me just now. Here's Deane rowing about the rent of this house, when he ought to have been glad to have the place kept warm and dry through such a winter. Oh, I've had some nice experiences of late of human gratitude; I could write a book about it. As soon as you're down in your luck, then the truth comes out. If you can ask them to dinner, and give them the best of everything, then it's "My dear fellow" all over the place; or if they fancy you're on good terms with some of the trainers, they are ready to black your boots; but the moment your luck turns against you, then it's "Pay up, or you'll be in the County Court next week." Well, we'll see what Wednesday does. I hope it will be the turning-point. I've had ill-luck before, but never such a run; the time has come for a change surely.'

'It seems such a pity, Fred,' she ventured to say (for she was thinking of the small boy upstairs, and of many little plans and schemes she had been drawing out on his behalf) 'that you should let everything hang on a mere chance.'

'Oh yes, I know,' he returned scornfully, 'that is what women always say. It's such a pity we're not all angels. Well, I never pretended to be one. Besides, the question

doesn't interest me. What does interest me is whether Cherry-band is going to win the Grand Prize at Sandown on Wednesday—that interests me, a very great deal, I can tell you.'

He paused for a second or two, staring into the fire, and then he rose and went and filled a pipe.

'Oh, he must,' he said, half to himself, and indeed, as if he were inclined to laugh at himself. 'He must, he must, he must. Every man and lad in the stable has put his last farthing on him. He's ten pounds better than Cryddesho.'

She came to him with the cheque.

'Here it is, Fred, but don't be reckless.'

'I'm not reckless!' he said, turning upon her. 'I tell you, we simply can't live on the income we have at present, and when I try to make things a little better you say I'm reckless! You don't suppose any human being can have a constant run of good luck. I had a fair slice of it after we were married, and you didn't complain then. You must take the bad with the good, like other people; and it's no use, when things *are* bad, when one is trying one's best to pull through, I say it's pure nonsense to talk about recklessness.'

But that was neither his tone nor his manner when, early on the morning after the Sandown Grand Prize had been run for, he came back to Witstead. For the first time in their life together Sabina saw him thoroughly cowed;

he was pale and agitated; and at the same time unusually reticent. No wonder she was alarmed.

'What is the matter, Fred?' she asked.

'Everything is the matter,' he answered, curtly.

He went upstairs to his dressing-room and got together a few things, which he brought down and proceeded to put hurriedly into his bag, and while doing so made her some brief explanation.

'I must get out of the way for a little while, that's all, he said. 'I'm in a mess. I must clear out and get away until I see how things are to be squared.'

'Where are you going, Fred?' she asked calmly.

'You'd better not know. You can say you don't know. But, look here, whatever money you can send me—and you may imagine I shall have need of every penny—you can send to Captain Raby; he will know how to pass it on.' He scribbled a few words on a piece of paper. 'That is his address. If you send post-office orders, make them payable to him, not to me.'

'Is—is everything gone, Fred?' she ventured to ask.

'Everything? I should think so. Everything!'

She went forward and put her hand on his arm.

'Fred, will you let this be the end now? I should not regret the loss of the money if only you would promise to have done with betting. Will you?'

He shook off her hand.

'Oh, don't talk. Cherry-band was drugged. I saw it

the moment I clapped eyes on him. He was quite dazed and helpless when they pulled him out to run. Well, it has done for me. Even if the owner and trainer find out the scoundrel, that won't help me. What money have you in the house?'

The sudden question startled her. Clearly he was bent on immediate flight.

'A little over four pounds, I think,' she answered.

'Well, I must have it,' he said briefly.

'Fred!'

'Now don't make a fuss, but go and get it. Do you think this is a time for talking? I can tell you it's more serious than that.'

He had finished his packing by this time, and had gone to the sideboard for a piece of cake and a glass of spirits and water.

Sabina said nothing further, but went away upstairs, slowly and stealthily, for the child was lying asleep. On the landing, however, she paused irresolute. She could hear the girl she had left in charge hushing the baby, and, indeed, making some effort to imitate the cradle-song that Sabina was used to croon. But it was not to listen she stood there; it was to bring her mind to this robbery of her child, as she considered it; and at last she gave way—she could not do it. She went down again to the room.

'No,' she said, with her face grown very pale, 'I will

not do it, Fred; I cannot be so mean. It is not of myself I am thinking. If I were starving I would not complain; but it's the child—if he were taken ill—and nothing in the house——'

'Oh, if you won't get it, I must fetch it for myself, I suppose,' he said; and upstairs he went to the bedroom, where he found no difficulty in getting the money out of her desk. A few minutes thereafter he had gone from the house and was on his way to the station.

And so Sabina was once more left helpless and penniless and alone: and it is hardly to be wondered at that more than ever, if that was possible, she prized and treasured the one consolation of her solitary existence. The child became the very life of her life; the source of any glimmer of joy that shot athwart these darkened days; the one cheerful thing she could think of as regarded the future. She was angry and indignant with the little maidservant for not understanding what baby said—efforts at conversation which were mostly the creation of the mother's fancy; she wrote wonderful accounts to Janie of his exploits and qualities; when baby was pleased she was happy, and for the moment forgot everything else. Indeed it was oftentimes with a wondering gratitude that, amid all her dumb fears for the future, and her present anxieties and trouble, she could turn to this other living creature, as much concerned as herself, but so happily unconscious. She would sing the cradle-song to him:—

'Now hush-a-baw, lammie,
And hush-a-baw, dear,
Now hush-a-baw, lammie,
Thy minnie is here;
The wild wind is ravin,'
Thy minnie's heart's sair,
The wild wind is ravin',
But ye dinna care.'

And very glad was she to take the last of these lines as solace to herself. It may be mentioned that Walter Lindsay, incidentally, of course, asked Janie, in a letter, whether it was likely that Sabina had heard of the Highland mother's pet name for her child—'the lamb of my heart;' and it is to be guessed that that piece of information was not long in finding its way down to Witstead. Sabina was glad to have the pretty phrase; the fact implied in it she had already found out for herself.

But soon this uneventful solitude was to be startled by unwelcome news. Old Mr. Foster wrote:—

'DEAR DAUGHTER-IN-LAW—Mother has grown much worse. She anxiously wishes to see you, and the boy, if it is possible. Tell Fred he must come at once.'

She feared what this might mean, and instantly telegraphed to Captain Raby for her husband's address. To her astonishment and indignation, instead of answering this telegram forthwith, Captain Raby made his appearance at Witstead Cottage, and hoped that she would command his services

in any possible way, if he could be of assistance to her. She briefly answered that all she wanted was to know where her husband was at that moment. She remained standing, her tall figure drawn up to its full height; her mouth firm; her eyes proud and invincible. It was he who was somewhat abashed; and he began to make a few excuses for his visit—saying it was necessary just then to be a little cautious in revealing Fred Foster's whereabouts, and the like. And then, twirling his waxed moustache the while, he endeavoured to introduce a little bland facetiousness about Mr. Foster's ways and weaknesses; and clearly wished to be asked to sit down and prolong the interview. Sabina had no such intention in her head. With cold insistence she got from him, if not her husband's actual address, at least the name of a person in Yorkshire who was in communication with him; and then with a formal 'Thank you; good-morning,' Captain Raby found himself dismissed and free to return to London. His temper was not improved by this visit, as one or two of his associates discovered that afternoon.

Sabina, not understanding precisely why her husband should wish to remain concealed for the moment, concluded that it would be better not to telegraph to him; but she wrote him an urgent letter, telling him of the news she had received, and begging him at once to go down to Buckinghamshire. As for herself, he would know it was impossible for her to go; she had not the money, for one thing.

She posted the letter at once, but she might have spared herself the trouble. The very next morning there came a telegram; she opened it with trembling fingers; it contained a brief and laconic message from a broken-hearted old man —'*Do not come.—All is over.*' Sabina let the paper fall on the table. That gentle-eyed woman had been very, very kind to her. And it seemed so pitiless that the one idol of her life—for whom she had striven so much, for whom she had sacrificed so much—should not have been with her in her last hours. It was impossible that he could have got the letter. It was next to impossible that any intelligence of the approaching end could have reached him.

It was three days after that, and late in the evening, that Fred Foster suddenly made his appearance at Wayside Cottage. She was horrified beyond measure at the sight of him. He was as one demented; his face white and haggard; his eyes furtive, and yet with a strange glare in them; and his clothes were crumpled and soiled as if he had been asleep on the floor of a third-class carriage.

'Did you get my letter?' she said breathlessly.

'What letter?' he said—and his speech was thick in his throat. 'No, I got no letter. I saw the—the announcement in the *Times*. My God!'

He was pacing up and down the room like some wild beast in a cage.

'Did she send no message to me? Was there no message

for me? That's what I have come for. Surely—surely—a word——'

'Here is the letter from your father,' she said gravely; and she handed it to him.

He glanced hurriedly over it; and then, with a slight cry as of pain, he threw himself on the sofa, face downward, and broke out into a wild fit of sobbing. She was terrified. For a young woman, she had seen a great deal of human sorrow; but she had never seen a man so moved before.

'I wish I was dead too,' he said, in broken sentences, between the sobs, 'and it would be better for everybody. Oh, I can see it well enough. I wish I had never been born. It's been my luck all the way through to bring misery to every one, and what's the use of holding on now when you can only do more and more harm? It's no good trying any more now; everything's against me; and there she has gone away just when I was at the worst. But—but I can make reparation—to others. The old man won't have to fret any more. And—why did you ever marry me? I told you what kind of fellow I was. I might have been better if there had been a little luck; but it was all against me. And you'll be all right; you are a strong woman. Yes, you are a stronger woman than I am a man; but there is something you are not strong enough to do; and I am going to do it; it's the only thing I can do now. I am going out of this world altogether—it's the only reparation

I can make; if the poor old Mater knew, she would say I was doing right——'

Sabina went to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

'Fred, you must not talk like that! Tell me, are you going to the funeral?'

'I daren't—I daren't,' he groaned. 'I would kill myself on her grave. And perhaps the best thing, too, that could happen, for it's all over now.'

'No, no; don't take on so,' she said soothingly. 'See, here is a piece of porcelain that I have been painting for baby's birthday, with the date on it, and a wreath of mixed none-so-pretty and forget-me-not. Janie is going to have it glazed and fired for me.'

By and by he rose; but he would listen to none of her proposals that he should have something to eat or drink, or that he should go to bed. He would not go upstairs that night, he said; he was going out, and might be back late; he did not wish to wake the child. And then he wandered away into the darkness.

It was about three in the morning when he returned; and thereafter she, lying awake in the silence, could hear him pacing up and down; and sometimes she thought she could hear him say 'Mother!' And if she was convinced that this passion of grief was sincere enough for the moment, still, she could not tell that the remorse accompanying it was likely to be a permanent or fruitful thing; on the contrary, as she looked away to the future (in those despondent hours

that herald in the dawn), and as she considered that the one salutary and controlling influence over Fred Foster's life had now been taken away, she could only despairingly conjecture what the fate of herself, and of her child, that was dearer to her than herself, was likely to be.

CHAPTER XXX

AN OLD FRIEND

It was about a couple of months after this that Fred Foster was one morning walking in towards the town of Scarborough, carelessly switching at the wayside weeds with his cane, and apparently thinking hard. Indeed, so preoccupied was he that he would probably have allowed a smart little chaise, drawn by a pair of small brown ponies, to have passed unnoticed, had not the solitary occupant of the vehicle pulled up, and rather timidly pronounced his name. She was a woman of about thirty, stylishly dressed in a driving-coat of silver-gray plush, and beef-eater hat of the same material; and she would have been distinctly good-looking had she only let her face alone. But her desperate efforts to appear ten years younger than she really was were somewhat too obvious; her abundant yellow hair looked bleached; and her lips, that were a trifle thin and hard in expression, owed something, it is to be feared, to artificial aid. And yet, notwithstanding the aggressive character of her thin features and steely blue eyes, she was now regarding Fred Foster with considerable doubt,

as if she was uncertain as to how he would answer her appeal.

'Oh, how do you do?' he said rather coldly.

She shifted the whip, and familiarly held out her right hand.

'There—let bygones be bygones.'

'I have no objection,' he said, and he stepped forward and took her hand for a moment. 'Who could have expected to meet you here? I thought you lived at Doncaster?'

'One word,' she interposed. 'Have you heard anything about me lately?'

'No; I haven't been about much,' he said, evasively.

'Then you may as well call me Mrs. Fairservice again, if you don't mind.'

'What?' he said. 'You don't mean that? Have you and Bernard——'

'Oh, don't talk to me about Charlie Bernard,' she again interposed, with a scornful little laugh. 'I've had enough of Charlie Bernard. I found him out in the end. Why, if you only knew what a hound he is—— But there, we won't speak about him. You never thought much of him?'

'I had no great reason to think much of him,' remarked Foster, who was too shrewd a man of the world to say anything more definite. He knew that this fair dame had a pretty violent temper; and no doubt there had been a quarrel—which very likely might get patched up again.

'And you?' she said, scanning him from head to foot with her cold, scrutinising eyes. 'You don't seem over-flourishing. I heard you had got into queer street?'

'You heard right, then,' he answered, rather gloomily.

'And you, of all men in the world!' she said, with a sardonic little laugh. 'I wonder how you like being hard up. I should be curious to see how you bear it. Somehow I can't imagine your living up a tree. It doesn't seem natural. I suppose you swear a good deal?'

'Oh, I assure you it is quite a laughing matter!' he retorted, a little bit nettled.

'No, no, I didn't mean that,' she said at once. 'Come, tell me what you are doing in Scarborough?'

'I have just been out to Holkley Hall. Raby is there just now—you remember Captain Raby?'

'Of course I do.'

'Well, he's trying to fix things together for me. You may laugh as you like, but living the life of a badger in a hole is rather monotonous. And it wasn't through any fault of mine that I got into this mess. It was Cherry-band that broke me—of course you heard of the drugging of Cherry-band? Oh, I can tell you, I have had some rare experiences of human nature since then. I never had a high and mighty opinion of my fellow-creatures; but it was little I knew how mean they could be until I got broke.'

'Yes, on the turf it is every man for himself and the

devil catch the hindmost. And the worst of it is that the devil does catch the hindmost.'

But she did not seem interested in what she was saying, or in what he was saying either. As he went on to detail his woes and wrongs she listened in silence, looking at him from time to time, as if she was pondering over some very different matters. At length she said abruptly: 'Will you dine with me to-night?'

He hesitated.

'Are you at an hotel?'

'Yes,' she said, and she named the hotel.

'Do you mean the *table d'hôte?*' he asked, with an involuntary look downwards at his attire, which was none of the smartest.

She instantly understood his hesitation.

'No, we will dine in my sitting-room. Come as you are, of course. At seven, that we may have a good talk afterwards. Is it a bargain?'

'Very well—thank you,' he said.

'Mind, it is Mrs. Fairservice you ask for. Good-bye just now.' And therewith she touched the ponies, and drove on.

Towards seven o'clock that evening he made himself as trim as was possible and went along to the hotel, where he found Mrs. Fairservice, very elegantly attired, and apparently in a merry mood. Glancing at the table, he saw that it was laid for two.

'You have no one with you?' he asked.

'Oh dear, no; I think I can take care of myself,' she answered blandly. 'And they know me at this hotel.'

She had ordered a neat little dinner for him, and was evidently well acquainted with men's tastes. The things were all good of their kind, but not too numerous; there was no dawdling over sweets; the wines were excellent; and awaiting him there lay on the mantelpiece half a dozen cigars—not greeny-gray, nor foxy-red, nor black with bitterness, nor veined with oil, but (when stripped of their silver-foil and tissue paper) plump, smooth, softly-brown Cabanas, with promise of supernal joy.

'I can hardly help laughing,' she said, when together they were seated at the table, 'to think of Master Fred being up a tree. Honestly now, did you ever deny yourself anything!'

'Never when I could get it,' he answered frankly. 'What is the use?'

'You're married, aint you?'

'Yes.'

'Where's your wife?'

'In Surrey—Witstead—near Epsom.'

'How does she get on?'

'What do you mean?'

'Who supports her? You can't, I know.'

'Oh, she has money from her father, and from my father too. That is a pretty joke. To spite me, I

suppose, the old gentleman prefers to pay over my allowance to her. But it's the same thing in the end.'

'Yes, I should imagine so,' she said, drily. 'What do you think of that Chablis?'

'It is very good indeed.'

'They told me it was.'

'But why don't you take any?' he asked.

'Well,' she answered, 'I have had some vexations to get through lately, and I find that wine keeps the brain too much alive to these things—especially if you are lying awake at night. I don't worry so much when I keep to water.'

'Don't you drink wine at all, then?'

'Sometimes I have a little champagne. Here, waiter, open that bottle.'

'Yes, madam.'

'What worries have you had?' Fred Foster asked, with that masculine disregard of the presence of servants which women never acquire.

'I will tell you presently,' said Mrs. Fairservice, with a discreet wink.

But even when the waiter had gone from the room she seemed to wish to keep away from that topic. Indeed they had a great many things and persons to talk over; and among them—a topic to which Mrs. Fairservice pertinaciously, and Fred Foster most unwillingly, returned—was his wife.

'What kind of a woman is she?' his companion asked frankly.

'Oh, she's a good enough sort,' he answered, with some reluctance. 'Rather lofty in her notions sometimes, for the humble likes of me. Brought up among philanthropic fads, and that kind of thing. Why, I believe, if she had a sixpence to spare, she would sooner send it to the soup-kitchens at Westminster than spend it on her own child.'

'What?' Mrs. Fairservice cried, with a burst of rather thin-tinkling laughter. 'You don't mean to say you are a papa?'

'Yes, I am.'

'Well, well, well. Wonders will never cease. To think of Master Fred being a father! You don't look it somehow. But about your wife—I heard she was the daughter of a swell?'

'I don't know what you call a swell,' he said rather sulkily. 'She is the daughter of Sir Anthony Zembra, who is the meanest cur in these three kingdoms. However, I'm going to have all that put to rights as soon as I can go south. I'm not going to stand it any longer. There's my father, who is a poor man, he gives us more than Zembra does. But that will soon be put straight. Raby is patching up my affairs. And when I get south, I'm going to have a little settlement with Sir Anthony Zembra. I'm not going to support his daughter.'

Mrs. Fairservice deliberately put down her knife and fork.

'You are not going to support his daughter,' she slowly repeated. 'Well, you are a most delightful wag!'

But the quick glance of anger that he darted at her showed that she had gone too far, or else that he had drank too much champagne; so she instantly changed her manner, and began to prophesy smooth things; and to say that Sir Anthony Zembra, if approached in the proper way, would of course come to the aid of his son-in-law.

Dinner over, coffee was brought in; and she herself fetched him a cigar, which he lit, drawing his chair a little bit back from the table. She went and stood by the fireplace, her back to the empty grate. When the waiter had removed the things, and they were once more left alone, she said, 'Now I am going to tell you something. Perhaps you won't be surprised. You say you have had some experience lately of human nature—meanness, and that. Well, so have I. What would you say, now, if I told you that it was Charlie Bernard who threw *me* over?'

There was a curious smile on her lips, somewhat belied by the look in her eyes.

'I should say you had had a quarrel,' said Foster prudently, 'which you will soon make up again.'

'There was no quarrel,' she said, with an increasing harshness in her voice. 'He deliberately threw me over—left me—for some barmaid or other at Chester—going to marry her, I hear! And I made that man! What was he five years ago? You know. Scarce enough to buy himself a toothpick. And there at the Ackworth sale last week he gave twelve hundred guineas for Trig-

onella and eight hundred for Master of Roy. Two thousand guineas at one sale—how did he come by that, do you think?'

'He has had the devil's own luck,' Foster said pensively. 'Everything he has touched has turned to gold.'

'And who put him in the way of making a single farthing?' she demanded. 'Luck? What is your luck if you've nothing to back it with? You know well enough what I did for that man. Well? Don't you think I take it very quietly? You used to gird at me because of my temper. Am I in a temper?'

He looked at her.

'I don't know,' he said. 'But if you got a chance of doing Charlie Bernard a mischief, I shouldn't like to be in his shoes!'

'Vitriol-throwing?' she said, with a harsh laugh. 'Oh no, I won't spoil his beauty—I'll leave that to the barmaid, and welcome.'

And then, with a surprising suddenness, she stepped forward to the table and put her clenched fist on it; and her eyes were sparkling with rage, and her face was thin and hard and white.

'No,' she said, with a fury that was all the more obvious from her efforts to conceal it, 'I won't spoil his beauty, but I'll ruin him. I tell you I won't rest in my grave until I have ruined that man. I made him; and I'll break him!'

'You won't find it easy to get the better of Charlie Bernard,' Foster observed.

'Bah! That's all you know,' she said contemptuously. 'That's all you know. But I understand Charlie Bernard down to his boots; and I tell you he's a fool. He thinks he can't go wrong. The luck has been with him so long that his head's turned. And that's where I'll have my gentleman, see if I don't!'

She resumed her station by the fireplace. That sharp ebullition of rage over, she strove to appear perfectly calm. But her mouth was cruel.

'And how do you propose to get at him?' Foster asked.

'That's my affair,' she said, shortly. 'But I don't mind telling you that I mean it. I shouldn't mind telling all the world; for I daresay Charlie Bernard himself has a shrewd notion that I will do my little best. And I haven't been in all his stable secrets for over four years for nothing.'

And then she said, looking hard at him: 'Of course I should want somebody to stand in with me. I couldn't appear myself. Charlie Bernard is conceited; but he is wary enough; and he'll be watching me for many a day to come. No; I must have a trustworthy agent to do the trick for me; and if we pulled it off, it would be well worth his while.'

That she was referring to himself was clear enough.

'But I don't quite understand what you are driving at,' he said. 'Do you mean fair means or foul?'

'I didn't know there was any difference on the turf,' she answered saucily.

'Well, I have no reason to be nasty particklar,' said he, with a laugh. 'I don't see why you shouldn't hit back with the same kind of stick that hits you. If nobbling is to be the game, it shouldn't be all on one side. But it's a very dangerous game, and not often tried nowadays; at least, it doesn't succeed very often. They managed it pretty well with Cherry-band, though.'

'Well, what do you say?' she asked abruptly.

'Oh, I'm not in it. You must look out for somebody else. I'm broke. Of course you want somebody who can weigh in with coin.'

She paused for a second or two.

'I don't know about that. Of course I should like to have some one go in equal risks with me, if I was quite sure that at the last minute he wouldn't play his own game and land me. Besides, I don't know any one I could trust. I could trust you because it would be worth your while.'

'Thank you.'

'Oh, we'd better speak plain. I mean business this time.' There was a flash of fire in her eyes. 'I tell you, if I had to sell every stick and stone that I possess—if I had to sell the clothes off my back—I would do it to bring that man to the gutter. And it's there I'll have him, you mark my words. And I'm not in a hurry—no, no—I can wait and watch my chance. I'm not going to spoil it by

rushing it. I'm not going to show my hand until I've got the odd trick safe and sure. But then—*then* I'll let him know. What will he take to, do you think? I should like to see him a billiard-marker at Gatti's!'

She rang the bell.

'I beg your pardon—I forgot to ask for liqueurs.'

'I would rather have a brandy-and-soda,' he said.

'Very well,' she said, and that was ordered.

Then she went over and sat down by the table. In her eagerness she seemed to take it for granted that Foster was willing to become her ally.

'Do you know Joe Cantly?' she said, when the waiter had brought in the brandy-and-soda and gone away again.

'Only to speak to.'

'If we could only make sure of Joe Cantly, the whole thing would be as simple as possible. Bernard and he are hand and glove in everything. But he would be a difficult customer to get at. He prides himself on his professional honour!'

'What!' Foster exclaimed. 'Why, they declare he roped Redhampton at Liverpool.'

'It's a lie,' she said bluntly. 'I was there. He no more pulled that horse than I did. All the stable were backing him, Cantly as well. No, I believe Joe Cantly has so far ridden as fair and square as any jock that ever breathed.'

'Every man has his price,' Foster said, as he went to the mantelpiece for another cigar.

'Yes, but I imagine Joe Cantly's price is rather beyond me. There might be other means,' she added musingly.

Foster looked up, but neither spoke nor smiled. What he said to himself, however, was, 'Does this woman really think she has youth and beauty enough to inflame the heart of that little shred of a jock?'

'Gratitude doesn't count, I suppose,' she continued. 'And yet he ought to be grateful to me. Why, he was only a stable-lad when I went first to Doncaster. It was I who got the General to give him his first mount, because I liked the look of the boy. I wish I could have an hour's talk with him, just to see whether his devotion to my dear friend Charlie Bernard is of an unusual kind.'

And then she said, 'Well, are you going to stand in with me?'

'I should like to know more distinctly what you're aiming at,' he said.

'Do you expect I can put it all down on paper at a moment's notice?' she retorted. 'Well, yes, I could. I'm aiming at the ruin of Mr. Charles Bernard—that's about it; and it's got to be done if a woman can do it. You mean the way of doing it? Well that wants time. But I know this, that it is bad luck that makes most men reckless, but it is good luck that makes Bernard reckless. He'll back his fancy through thick and thin; no hedging for him; no, no; my gentleman knows a horse when he sees one. The sporting papers have turned his head, that's the fact. He

thinks he is bound to be right. And he is conceited, and knows that big figures make the stable-boys gape. There's but the one end for a man like that—when it is properly prepared for him. Now, do you understand?'

'It has been done,' he said absently.

'When do you go up to town?'

This startled him out of his reverie.

'I don't know quite. I went out to see Raby this morning. He has been trying to square things a little for me—and there's a young fellow called Russell who has turned out a bit of a trump——'

'I am going back to Doncaster to-morrow,' she said. 'And in about three weeks' time I expect to be in London. If you are there then you might call on me at the Northern Counties Hotel, Jermyn Street. You won't forget the address?'

He pencilled it down in his memorandum-book.

'There are some writs out against me, that's the fact,' he said. 'And people are so unreasonable. Of course you can't give them money if you haven't got it. All the summonses and county courts and writs in the world won't create money where it doesn't happen to be.'

'Ah well, of course,' said Mrs. Fairservice, who was a business-like woman, 'if you are in so bad a hole as that, if you can't get about, it's hardly worth while talking about that little scheme. But you say things may mend. Well, come and see me in Jermyn Street if they do. I may have

something to tell you by that time—something to your advantage, as the advertisements say. You look as if you wanted it, don't you, Master Fred?'

Presently he rose to go, and she insisted on his putting the remaining cigars in his pocket. On the top of the staircase, as she bade him good-bye, she said, 'Jermyn Street, then. *Au revoir!*'

CHAPTER XXXI

A THREAT

One morning Sabina was seated alone and at work—painting some flowers on a terra-cotta vase. She earned a little that way now, thanks to Janie's intercession with the manager of a well-known firm in Oxford Street. It was but a small addition to her income, yet it was something; and she considered it as peculiarly her own; and made no scruple about devoting it entirely to the comfort and welfare and amusement of her boy. As for her other money, every farthing that she could save, by the exercise of the most rigid and constant economy, was claimed by Foster, whose demands were becoming more and more peremptory and extortionate. Not only that, but he had begun once more to insist on her going to her father, to obtain some more suitable provision; and plainly he warned her that, as soon as he was come south again, he would see that the present condition of affairs should be brought to an end. Sabina tore up those letters with a sigh. She knew that appealing to her father would be of no avail. And even if their income were to be doubled or trebled, what hope was

there that Foster would change his mode of life? Indeed she tried hard not to think of these things; and kept herself busily occupied in tending the child, and looking after the house, and filling up every spare moment with this terra-cotta painting. But there was a shadow ever present on her brow; and her manner was grave; and she was a good deal paler than the Sabina of old. It was only when her boy stretched out his arms towards her that a soft lustre of happiness shone in the mild, beautiful eyes.

She was seated at the table in her small parlour when she heard a slight tapping at the door.

'Come in!'

'A gentleman to see you, ma'am,' said the little maid-servant, and therewith Captain Raby stepped into the room.

She had been so much engaged with her work that she had not heard him open the front gate; and now she was so surprised by his unexpected appearance—having some swift momentary recollection of the way she had received him on a former visit—that when he said, 'I have brought you some news of your husband, Mrs. Foster,' she involuntarily asked him to be seated. He took a chair, put his hat on the floor beside him, and began to pull off his gloves.

'Yes—I—I happened to be in the neighbourhood,' he began, and he had evidently forgiven her curtness on that former occasion, for he strove to be most amiable in manner, 'and I saw Fred last week—the week before it

was, really—and I thought I might as well drop in and let you know how he was getting along. Not very well at this moment, I am afraid, though there is something of a prospect for him; indeed I have a little commission on that subject from our mutual friend, Mr. Russell, whom you may remember, perhaps.'

She paused for a second; she did not answer.

'No, as I say, I don't think Fred Foster could be in a worse plight than he is just now. You see, he always was such a headstrong fellow. When things went wrong with him, nothing would do but that he must force them right; now you can't force things right if luck is against you.'

'Have you any particular news of my husband?' she interposed, somewhat coldly.

'Nothing very satisfactory—nothing that you would much care to hear, perhaps,' he answered, as he quietly twisted his moustache and regarded her. Then he added, with an ironical smile, 'Of course there are compensating circumstances in every lot, and Foster has at least hit upon one old acquaintance of his—an old flame of his, if I mistake not—a Mrs. Fairservice, who is pretty well off. But she is a very shrewd woman, is Polly Fairservice, and sharp; I don't think she would be inclined to help him; unless she saw it to be to her own advantage.'

Sabina's pale face flushed slightly.

'Is that what you came to tell me, Captain Raby?' she asked.

'Oh dear, no,' he answered blandly; 'I only came to consult you as a friend. I wish I could make you believe that. But the last time I called on you you seemed to think it a very unwarrantable intrusion. Why? I offer you my services—in any way you choose to command them.'

'I have no need of them,' she said stiffly.

'But you might have need of them.'

'Will you tell me briefly why you are here?'

'Yes, I will. I have come in your own interests. I have come to consult your wishes. Believe it or not, I am come as your friend—why, how otherwise should I come? Why should I bother myself about Fred Foster's affairs except for your sake? I think you might recognise that a little. Well now, I want to know what you want done. Practically, Foster has deserted you——'

'I beg your pardon, he has done nothing of the sort; and I will not stay to hear my husband's actions discussed in any way whatsoever,' Sabina said, and she pushed away her painting materials as if, on the least provocation, she meant to leave the room.

'Very well, but the fact remains,' he said quietly. 'Now this is a very miserable life you are leading—alone, away from your friends, with no amusement, with no one to protect you——'

'That, at least, is true,' she said.

He continued without heeding the interruption: 'And,

as far as I can guess, supporting a worthless fellow who never could earn his own living, and who never will——'

'Captain Raby, you come here as a friend——'

'Of yours,' he interposed. 'One moment. I ask you to listen to what I have to say. It rests with me to decide whether your husband is to come back here or not.'

She stared at him in astonishment.

'Yes, you are surprised, naturally; but such is the case,' he continued. 'Foster's affairs are in such a precious muddle that he dare not show himself in any of his old haunts. Very well. There is only one man in the country who is fool enough to think of helping him out of the hole —and that is Johnny Russell; and Russell will act on my advice. Suppose I say yes, and get some money from Jack Russell; and square certain people, and pacify others, so that Foster may return to London, and come here also, what are you to expect? Do you think he will ever be other than he is? Would you like to have him back? Would it be to your gain, do you think? You see now that it is as a friend I have come to you—to consult your interests, and yours alone.'

He spoke rapidly and plausibly, and she was a little bewildered.

'But—but—in any case he must be coming back here,' she stammered.

He smiled.

'Without Jack Russell's help, I think it will be a very

long time indeed before Master Fred will show his face on any racecourse in England.'

'But here—to his own house!' she said.

'The writters would be after him like a pack of wolves. No; you may rest assured, dear Mrs. Foster, that we can keep your husband from worrying you, if you wish it. If you will only look at your position in a sensible way; look at it as any woman of the world would look at it; consider what your life is likely to be if Foster comes back penniless and desperate; then, I think, you will take the obviously prudent decision of leaving him where he is. Why, the whole situation is absurd. A beautiful woman like you—and living in a place like this: the two things are not compatible.'

Sabina rose—her lips very pale—and she grasped the back of the chair with her hand.

'I don't know—I don't know whether you mean to insult me, Captain Raby——'

'I insult you! Is it an insult to call a woman beautiful? Then your glass must insult you every minute in the day!'

'But I must ask you to go. I do not wish to have my husband's affairs, or mine, interfered with by any third person—least of all by you.'

'Oh, but really, now——'

'Surely, surely,' she said, with indignation in her voice, 'you will go when I ask you. You profess to be a gentleman!'

'Of course, I obey you,' he said, as he slowly took up his hat, and went to the door. 'But please remember it is for you to decide. And you may change your mind.'

When he had gone, she stood for a second irresolute, for there was still pride and indignation in the firm-set lines of her mouth; but the next moment her lips began to quiver a little, and presently she sank down into her chair again, and bent forward her head between her two arms outstretched on the table, and was crying and sobbing like a child. For she had been much alone of late; and somehow she had fallen away from the high courage of the Sabina of old; now and again a kind of despair would seize her; and she could have wished to have done with this world and its ways altogether—if only her child were asleep by her side.

But if Captain Raby imagined that by simply doing nothing he could keep Fred Foster in banishment in the north, he was mistaken. Quite unexpectedly one evening Foster made his appearance at Wayside Cottage.

'Why do you stare?' he said, sulkily, to Sabina. 'I am not a ghost. I want something to drink.'

He looked travel-stained and tired, and his boots were dusty.

'I am afraid there is nothing in the house,' she said.

'Nothing?'

'We never use anything of the kind; the girl has beer-money instead of beer, so we have no need for it.'

'Well, then, send to the Chequers—it will be open yet. Whisky, gin, any poison they have. Why don't you keep decent spirits in the house? Saving, I suppose—cheese-paring—as if that was any good. Well, there's got to be an end of that now. The farthing system has got to be abolished.'

She went to give instructions to the maidservant. When she came back he said, 'I suppose you haven't been to your father?'

'No, Fred, I——'

'I thought not. Well, I have come here to see that you do go, and that you make your going worth while. There's to be no nonsense this time, I can tell you; it isn't a time for nonsense.'

'I am quite sure, Fred,' she pleaded, 'that it won't be of the slightest use.'

'You've got to make it be of use,' he replied. 'I must have two hundred pounds within the next three weeks; and that only as a beginning.'

'You know it is impossible!' she exclaimed.

'I know nothing of the kind. But I do know that it depends on you, if only you will put your fine feelings in your pocket.'

'What can I do, Fred? What am I to say?' she asked, in a kind of bewilderment.

'The first thing you can do,' he said, coolly and methodically, 'is to sit down and write a letter to my father, asking

him for fifty pounds. If you pitch the appeal strong enough, you will get it easily. Very well. I can put my hands on the remaining hundred and fifty as soon as I can show a reasonable prospect of paying it back by instalments; and it is for *your* father to provide that by doubling your allowance. That is clear enough, isn't it?'

'And even if you were to get the money, Fred——'

'Well?' he said—for she had hesitated.

'Would things be any better?'

'I don't know what you mean,' he said roughly. 'Sentiment, I suppose. Well, it isn't a time for sentiment with me, I can tell you. And when there is a chance of my pulling through, I'm not going to lose it without a fight. It's you that have got to provide the means. And that money I'm going to have.'

'But why should you threaten, Fred?' she remonstrated, for his attitude towards her was quite menacing. 'If I can get the money for you, you know I will. Don't I give you every farthing I can?'

'Oh, these paltry pittances are no good. I tell you, this is a serious matter. It's my last chance. And if I miss it then I'm off to America or Australia, and that's the last you'll see of me.'

Here the girl came back from the Chequers, and Foster, having mixed himself some drink, lit his pipe.

'But I hope to get even with Raby before that,' he said moodily.

'What has he been doing?' she asked.

'Oh, only like the rest! It's wonderful how you find out what human nature is when you're down on your luck. Quite useful it is—gives you such an insight. Here was Raby professing to be great friends with me, offering to go up to London to square up matters for me, pretending he had begged Johnny Russell to give me a hand. Why, it was by the merest accident I met Russell. Well, I *will* say, he is a good fellow, if he wasn't such a fool. And then he tells me that Raby had refused to take the trouble, and was so kind as to say that the country air was better for me than coming to town. But I'll be even with him yet.'

'I suppose you know Captain Raby came down here?' she asked.

He looked up angrily and suspiciously.

'What was he down here for?'

'He professed to be anxious to serve you.'

'By coming down here? Then I will tell you, the less you have to say to Raby the better.'

'I do not wish to have anything to say to him,' she answered calmly; 'and I do not think he is likely to come here again.'

The little maidservant now brought in supper, but he could not be persuaded to have any. Perhaps the simple repast of cold beef, bread, lettuce, and water did not look very tempting. Sabina sat down to the table by herself.

'You've never once asked about the boy, Fred,' she said reproachfully.

'Oh, I suppose he's all right,' he said, with some impatience. 'If he hadn't been I should have heard soon enough, I daresay. You know, when I see you sitting down to a supper like that, it looks ridiculous; and it is ridiculous. It is perfectly absurd. No one would believe it. Of course my father isn't as rich as your father, still between them we should be living in a perfectly different way. Water! "Drops of crystal water!" Not a glass of sherry in the house. Why, what do you suppose your people are doing at home just now? Your father at the head of a big dinner-table, all the men smoking and passing the wine, the women gone up to the drawing-room, and thinking it about time to get ready to go down to the reception at the Foreign Office. That's living. And you are of the same family. Cold beef and lettuce! You know, it's perfectly absurd!'

'But we had plenty to live upon, Fred, when we married,' she ventured to remonstrate. 'Surely, in a moderate way, we had abundance of everything we could want.'

'Yes, because I had a good turn of luck then,' he retorted. 'It was all very well then, and you were satisfied. But now, when the luck's against me, now you complain.'

She glanced at him for a moment.

'I don't think,' she said slowly—'I don't think you ought to say that of me, Fred.'

'Oh, there are different ways of complaining; it isn't all done by talking. However, that's neither here nor there. That's not what I'm come about here to-night. I'm going to have one more try for it before I skip across the seas, and you've got to help me.'

When she had finished supper, and the little girl had come in to clear the table, he said to her, 'Now, the best thing you can do is to sit down and write that letter to my father; then I will look at it and see if it will do.'

She hesitated for a second or two.

'Fred, don't think me unwilling to do anything I can for you. But—but I would rather go to my own father than write to yours for money——'

'You've got to do both, and that's the fact,' he said bluntly. 'This is not a time for half-measures.'

She went rather sadly to her desk.

'I must see what he says in his last letter,' she said. 'He is more anxious than ever that I should go and live with him at Missenden.'

'Yes, I daresay,' Foster remarked. 'Very likely. But we're not going into the catacombs just yet.'

She sat down at the little table.

'What shall I say?'

'Don't you know yourself? Better not tell him I am here, anyway. Can't you ask for it on account of the boy? —that would fetch him. Or you can blame me for it—that will fetch him too: say I left some bills unpaid—that

is true enough ; and the people are worrying for their money, which is also as true as the gospel. Anyhow, pitch it strong.'

It is impossible to describe the humiliation with which Sabina set about writing this letter, but she wrote it nevertheless ; and although, on looking it over, he grumbled that the appeal was not made sufficiently plaintive, he at length forbore to urge her further, and she was allowed to put the letter in an envelope, to be posted as soon as possible.

But the next morning his manner towards her was of a much more peremptory cast ; for he had now to give her instructions about the mission to her own father ; and that was of a far more serious nature than the mere borrowing of a temporary fifty pounds.

'You understand me,' he said, as he was preparing to leave, 'that I make you distinctly responsible for whatever may happen. It's absurd to imagine that a daughter can't get her father to be a little bit generous to her, if she goes about it the right way. Of course, if you stand on your dignity, so will he. If you give yourself airs, he will be glad of it ; it will be an excuse for his saying no, and he will save the money. And mind you leave me out of it. Tell him anything you like about me—tell him I'm in a cancer hospital, or in America, or in Van Diemen's Land, anywhere where his money is not likely to be of service to me. It's for you and the boy. And considering the circumstances, he might be willing to plank down a good round sum to begin with. Everything will depend on how you do it——'

'Fred, I will do my best,' she pleaded, 'but don't be disappointed if he refuses. Is there no other way you can save yourself? It seems so terrible to have everything depending on the one chance.'

'There is no other way, I tell you,' he said angrily. 'And of course if you go shrinking and cowering and assured of failure, you will fail. Very well; I tell you I will hold you responsible for what happens. But whatever does happen, you may be quite certain of one thing: if I am forced to leave the country, if I have to spend the rest of my days in Australia, I mean to take the boy with me when I go. So you just remember that.'

It was little he knew of the effect that these last words had upon Sabina, for he uttered them at the open door; and, without turning to look round, he walked down to the little gate, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXII

A CRY OF DESPAIR

She was absolutely stunned and bewildered by this threat; terror kept her motionless; she stood there like a statue, aghast and white; and then, urged by a sudden impulse, she went swiftly up the stair, broke into the room, snatched the boy from the nurse's knee, and wound her arms round him and pulled him close to her bosom.

'My darling! My darling!' she cried.

No tears came to her aid—she was too dismayed for that; she could only hold him tight to her; and as she walked up and down the room in a very agony of alarm and wild conjecture, she uttered from time to time breathless little moans, and talked to herself in broken ejaculations.

'He cannot—he cannot take my boy from me—the one thing I have on earth—the one thing—and that to be taken, too! God help me! Surely God will help me, if man will not. My lamb! If only we were lying dead together, that would be the best thing for us both.'

'What is it, ma'am; what is the matter?' the little maid-servant said, in great concern.

But Sabina paid no heed. She was as one quite distracted. She clasped the boy to her, and moaned over him as though her heart were breaking, and held his cheek to hers. 'My pretty one!—my pretty one!' she said. For in this first bewilderment of fear it never occurred to her to doubt the power of the father to take the child away from her; and well she knew Fred Foster's passionate and reckless malice when he was thwarted. And then those long years that rose as a ghastly vision before her eyes—herself a lone woman, broken-hearted, and hopeless—her boy growing up without her care, in some distant part of the world. And if these two were ever to meet they would be strangers! They would not know each other. They might pass each other in the street without recognition.

Then of a sudden there flashed through her burning brain the question whether the law would not protect her against this foreshadowed outrage. But here all was agonising doubt. Surely the mother was the natural guardian of her child; surely no one could take him away from her? And yet she had a haunting memory of having heard—and of having sympathised with—denunciations of the iniquity of the laws of England on this very matter. What was it they had said? She could not tell. She was too agitated and alarmed to think clearly; her endeavours to convince herself of her safety, and her shuddering fears that after all he might have the power to take her boy away from her, were only productive of mental torture; and at last, in her

abject dread and despair and helplessness, came the resolve to go instantly to London, to seek aid and counsel from her nearest friend. If Janie did not know, Janie would get to know, and at once. Life with this terror hanging over her was not possible.

She gave back the child in charge of the frightened little maid, hurriedly put on her things, and went out, walking quickly in the direction of the Vicarage. The Vicar's family were the only people whose acquaintance she had made in the neighbourhood, and she had made it in this way. It appeared that the households of better standing in that small part of the world had chosen, for some reason or another, to hold aloof from Mrs. Deane—a proceeding which was of very little moment to that lady, who spent most of her evenings in London theatres and music halls. It was probably owing to this circumstance that, when Sabina came to Wayside Cottage, the Vicar's wife did not call upon her; and then again, the young mother was wholly engrossed with her baby, and rarely appeared out-of-doors, preferring the solitude and freedom of the garden behind the cottage. But one day it happened that Sabina had taken the boy out in his perambulator for an excursion along the public highway, when Mrs. Lulworth, the clergyman's wife—a brisk and sensible little woman, extremely proud of her husband, and of her daughters, and of her poultry, and of her connection with the established church of her native land—chanced to come along, and so met them. Now

Mrs. Lulworth knew Sabina only as the tenant of Wayside Cottage; and had never seen her at close quarters; and she had half a mind to pass by without speaking. But just as she came quite near Sabina looked up; and the elder woman caught the expression of the younger woman's face, and of her gentle eyes. That was enough. She stopped. 'What a beautiful morning for baby to be out!' 'Yes, indeed it is.' 'The dear little fellow! How old is he?' That was the beginning. The next day Mrs. Lulworth and her troop of daughters called and left their cards. Then one of the younger girls, happening to see Sabina in the small front garden, went up and spoke to her, told her her name, was invited into the house, and returned home with an account which might almost have equalled one of Janie's rhapsodies. The acquaintanceship thus begun was soon assured; and if these good people rather wondered that they heard so little of Mr. Foster—for Sabina hardly ever mentioned his name—they had, on the other hand, discovered that their beautiful-eyed and gentle-mannered neighbour was a daughter of Sir Anthony Zembra, and that appeared to give them much satisfaction.

But it was not to seek counsel of this good little dame that Sabina was now hurrying along to the Vicarage, for she had no mind to tell the story of her life to people who were almost strangers. When she arrived at the house she rang the bell, and a servant appeared.

'Is Mrs. Lulworth at home?'

'No, ma'am, she has gone over to Banstead.'

'Or any of the young ladies?'

'Oh yes, ma'am; all of them. Won't you step in, ma'am?'

She followed the maid into the drawing-room; and there, indeed, through the open French windows she at once saw the whole of the five daughters—four of them playing tennis on the lawn, the fifth seated on a garden-chair, reading a book, all of them in their light-coloured summer dresses, and forming as pretty a sight as one could wish to see.

It was to the young lady in the garden-chair that the servant addressed herself; and the next moment the book was thrown aside, and the reader was tripping across the lawn, and up the steps with the fleet-footedness of a young roe. But the instant she entered the drawing-room the brightness of her fresh young English face gave way to a look of alarm.

'Dear Mrs. Foster, no one is ill?' she exclaimed.

'Oh no,' Sabina answered (she did not know how evident was the anxious distress written in her eyes), 'I am —am rather hurried, that is all. I have to go up to London suddenly; and you see I don't like to leave baby in charge of the little girl all by herself there. I was wondering whether your mamma would allow one of the maids to go along and keep her company till the afternoon, when I shall be back. I am frightened to think of anything happening while I am away—Ann is a good little thing, but nervous——'

'Oh, but that's all right,' said the young lady blithely. 'I'll go along and take charge of the boy myself——'

'Oh, please, no; I couldn't think of giving you so much trouble,' Sabina protested—but feebly; for she knew where the most tender care would be forthcoming.

'Oh, but yes, yes, yes. Indeed I insist. You don't know what friends we are. He is my king-favourite among all the children we know. Did you hear that he called me Cissy the other day when we were all at the gate?'

'He talks a great deal now,' Sabina said—for the moment pleased amidst all her trouble.

'But that's not it,' the young lady interrupted. 'I am the only one of us girls whose name he remembers, and you may imagine that I am very proud of it; they tell me I needn't swagger so; but he's my particular friend, anyway; and just you trust him to me for the day, dear Mrs. Foster: we shall have the most delightful fun.'

'It is really so very, very kind of you,' the grateful mother said. 'And when would it be convenient for you to go along?'

For answer Miss Cissy darted out of the drawing-room, whipped up her hat that was lying on the lawn and put it on her head, and was back in an instant.

'Now. If you are going to the station, I'll walk as far as the Cottage with you. Oh, if I had only known, I could have made him a hundred playthings. But we'll find out plenty, I am pretty sure.'

Even this brief bit of companionship was a comfort to her; but when she was again alone, in the railway-carriage going to London, the darkest forebodings returned. Nor could she get any enlightenment from thinking over those cases in her own experience where she had been partly instrumental in having children withdrawn from the custody of this or that parent—drunkenness being the invariable cause; for in no one instance had the law been appealed to; among these poor people the usual course is to follow the recommendation of the police-magistrate. And then again, supposing Foster to have the power of taking away her child, it was idle to think of appealing to her father to save her from this cruel wrong. How could she explain why this threat hung over her? Her only chance—and it was feeble enough, she knew—of getting any money from her father was to avoid all mention of Foster. He was supposed to be away somewhere—anywhere. It was for herself and her boy she was begging. Such were Fred Foster's last injunctions.

Arrived at Victoria Station, she took the underground railway to Notting Hill, and from thence walked to Walter Lindsay's house, which Janie and her husband still occupied. She was shown into the drawing-room. In a minute or two Janie made her appearance—in such a hurry of delight and welcome that she did not notice the expression on her friend's face. But after that close embrace, she retired a step to get a better look at her, and then she was startled.

'Sabie—what is the matter?' she exclaimed.

For a moment Sabina did not speak; she was afraid of breaking down; her lips were tremulous. And then she caught Janie's hand as if for support.

'Janie—Janie—he threatens to—to take my boy away from me!' It was a piteous cry for help, so stricken down was she by her terror.

'No—it is not possible!' Janie said, with frightened eyes.

'My boy—my darling—that was just all the world to me! My—very—life!'

But here she gave way altogether; and sank on to the couch behind her; and hid her head in the cushion; and sobbed and sobbed.

'My boy—my darling!' she kept moaning at intervals between her sobs. And then, in the very wildness of her grief, a confession was wrung from her that she had never uttered before: 'God knows, I—I thought I was—unhappy enough; but—but this is more than I can bear.'

Janie was frightened—overawed, perhaps; but not for long: she summoned all her courage to her, and she knelt down by her friend, and put her hand on her shoulder.

'Come, come, Sabie, don't give way so. Why, how you frightened me! You think he can take your boy away from you? What a silly notion! Where is all your common sense gone to, Sabie? You poor thing, you have

been living so much alone that all your nerves are gone astray, and anything terrifies you. A threat? But what is a threat! A threat is nothing. And it's your husband, I suppose, who says he will take away the boy from you. I needn't ask. But he hasn't done it; and he won't do it; I suppose you think there is no law in this country? Come, come, Sabie dear, pull yourself together, and tell me how he came to threaten anything so ridiculous.'

Janie was very cheerful and courageous; but she grew less so as Sabina, rather falteringly, told her tale; and at the end of it she was very much concerned. For the truth was her knowledge of the actual state of the law was no more exact than that of Sabina herself.

'I'll go and ask Philip; perhaps he can tell us.'

At the door, however, she suddenly paused and came back. 'In any case,' she said desperately, 'in any case, the question need never arise at all! What you have to do is to persuade your father to give you the money; then the whole thing is right. No one will attempt to take the boy!'

'I will do my best,' Sabina said, with weary eyes and sad lips. 'But I have no hope in that direction—none whatever.'

Janie went away to the studio to fetch her husband; and on their way back through the garden she briefly told him Sabina's story, with some observations on the character and conduct of Fred Foster which might perhaps have

startled that gentleman had he heard them. But she moderated her voice when they drew near the drawing-room.

On their entrance Sabina looked up quickly and anxiously.

'You see, now,' Janie exclaimed, with an air of triumph. 'You thought there was no law in this country? But if Phil tells you that you have the absolute guardianship of your child—that your husband can't interfere for years and years to come——'

'No, wait a moment,' the young artist said, less passionately. 'That is only my impression, Mrs. Foster—my belief. But, goodness knows, I am not going to say anything in favour of the law as regards the guardianship of children, for, as far as I know it, it is most abominable and wicked. I am not quite sure at what age of the child the father's legal control begins—but I know that then not only has he the sole right to say what education, what religion, what companionship the child is to have, but he can take the boy or girl, as it happens to be, away from the mother altogether. I hope I am not mistaken, but I am almost certain that is the law; and a more iniquitous thing was never imagined. It is simply playing into the hands of a scoundrel, for, of course, a respectable man would not take the child away from his mother so long as she was fit to have charge of him.'

He stopped and blushed hotly.

'I beg your pardon, Mrs. Foster,' he stammered. 'I was not even thinking of your husband—I was talking about the abstract question. And how I happen to know something about it is this—I know a case in which the husband, having promised before marriage that if there were any children by the marriage they were to be brought up in the religion of the mother, changed his mind afterwards, took the children away from her, had them educated as he wished, and brought up in his own religion, and refused to allow the mother to see them—except under a judge's order, that enabled her to pay them a short visit at stated times. That is how I happen to know what the law is; and a more monstrous thing couldn't be conceived.'

'But, dear Sabie,' Janie said eagerly, 'in the meantime he cannot touch your little boy!'

'Do you think that is any consolation?' Sabina answered, but without reproach; her eyes were absent.

Philip Drexel turned to his wife. 'It's Mrs. Whittington who is sitting to me this morning. I shouldn't be at all surprised if she knew when the father can assume the sole legal control of a child. It's wonderful how much some of those people know, where their interests are concerned—all about rates and taxes, school-boards, county-courts, and things of that kind. If Mrs. Foster will excuse me for a moment, I will go and see.'

He went along to the studio, and returned in about a couple of minutes.

'For the first seven years, she says, the mother has the guardianship of the child. And I am almost sure she is right,' he added, on his own account—for how was he likely to know of the discretionary powers now invested in the higher courts?

Sabina turned very pale.

'When he is seven years of age? Janie, think! Just think of it!' she said piteously. 'The boy grows up with you—your only companion—every fibre of your heart answering to his lightest touch; and then, when he is seven, he is snatched away from you, and you may never see him again. God forgive me, but I could almost wish that my little one were dead now and in his grave: I should follow soon.'

She rose wearily.

'But in the meantime, Sabie, he is all yours,' Janie protested. 'And yours only. No one can touch him.'

'Think of my life with this terror hanging over it,' she said. 'And what can I do? I am helpless—helpless.'

Janie caught her by the arm.

'Sabie,' she said vehemently, 'you are not going out of this house like that. I will not allow you to go away in that frame of mind. And while Phil and I are alive you need not say you are helpless. What are you to do now? Why, nothing is more simple! You and I will get into a cab, and we will go along to your father's house, or to the Waldegrave Club, or wherever he is likely to be; and then

you must prevail on him to let you have the money—and there will be no question at all of taking the boy away. That is what has to be done—it is as clear as daylight.'

'Unfortunately,' her husband interposed, 'it can't be done just at this moment. Sir Anthony Zembra is in Antwerp.'

Sabina turned quickly. 'How do you know?'

'He is over there at the Industrial Congress; I saw the names in this morning's paper,' was the answer.

'Ah well, it does not much matter,' Sabina said, and her eyes looked tired and worn. 'I could not have gone to see him without thinking over what I ought to say to him. I will go back to my little boy now; I need not miss any half-hour of being with him—while that remains to me.'

'Janie,' said the young artist sharply, 'why don't you ask Mrs. Foster to stay with us for a few days until her father comes back from Belgium? The baby could be sent for.'

But Sabina would not hear of that; nor would she allow Janie to go back with her to Witstead. Janie went with her to the Notting Hill Gate Station, and then insisted on going on with her to Victoria; and there they had to wait a little while for the train. The time was spent mostly in silence; for Janie's heart was heavy within her—except when fiery pulses of indignation and wrath shot through it; and she knew it was not worth while giving voice to these. And even her parting words of consolation and hope died away before the terrible loneliness and despair of this woman's look. All the way home Janie was haunted by

that look; and also there was ringing through her brain an appeal—a single phrase that she had heard or read, though at the moment she could not remember where—but surely it was a far-reaching cry of anguish—

'*Is there no pity sitting in the clouds?*'

CHAPTER XXXIII

ALLIES

When Fred Foster went to call upon Mrs. Fairservice in Jermyn Street, it was not without studied preparation; his hat and boots and gloves were all new and neat; and he had taken the greatest care of his general appearance. As she came into the room, and carelessly gave him her hand, her sharp eyes noticed this at once, and she laughed a little.

'What, then?' he said rather resentfully, for no one likes to be scrutinised in that fashion.

'We're smart, ain't we?'

'What did you expect?' he said. 'Did you want me to come in a fancy dress, like a ready-money fielder?'

'I was thinking of Scarborough,' she said good-naturedly. 'Oh, don't you think I am objecting. Quite the contrary. I think your appearance now would be much more likely to inspire the confidence of the betting public. And I hope it's a sign of a change of luck—I do, indeed.'

She was putting aside the window-curtains to let a little more of the afternoon light into the dusky apartment, while he put his hat and gloves on a small side-table hard by.

But when she turned to him again she seemed to be struck with something in his look.

'Hello,' she said, 'what's the matter with your eyes?'

'There's nothing the matter with my eyes,' he said, with still further subdued resentment. 'There seems to be with yours, though. They're remarkably inquisitive this evening.'

'You don't drink,' she said. 'No, you were always too wide awake for that. What have you been doing?'

He was both impatient and angry; but did not dare to show it. He muttered something in an apologetic way of his having suffered severely from toothache of late, and of his having tried chloral to procure him a little rest. He did not choose to tell her that it was the sleepless nights of agony and remorse following his mother's death that had driven him to this dangerous remedy.

'Then you'd better stop,' Mrs. Fairservice said plainly. 'If you and I are going to do anything together you'll want a level head. I suppose you understand?'

'Don't you be afraid,' he said, 'I can't see how an attack of toothache is going to interfere.'

'Come, sit down and tell me how your affairs are,' she said in a friendly fashion, but still regarding him with a watchful eye. 'At any rate, you are in London—that's a hopeful sign. Got everything squared up yet? Let me see, who was it who was coming in as peacemaker?'

'Oh, I am all right,' he said, with an assumption of easy confidence. 'That is to say, everything wants a little

time, but I see how it is to be managed. You mean Raby. No thanks to him. No; he played me a shabby trick, though Johnny Russell swears it was only carelessness or indifference. Well, it does not matter much. Russell has turned out a brick. And yet it does not seem such a great deal for a fellow with all his money to hold out a helping hand.'

'You see, Master Fred, that depends,' Mrs. Fairservice remarked, coolly. 'One does not like in any case to throw good money after bad. I am glad your young friend thinks better of your prospects. What's his little game?'

'I don't know what you mean,' he said.

'Why, what is his reason for coming forward in this magnanimous way, and hauling you out of the ditch? It isn't often done. What is his inducement?'

'Well, I call it pure good fellowship—friendship if you like.'

She shook her head.

'No,' she said, with a smile. 'That won't do. That's too thin. Or else he's an awful softie.'

'Women's views of friendship may be different from men's,' he said. 'I don't know. However, it does not matter. The fact remains that I hope, with Jack Russell's help, to have everything fair and square in a very short time. And now the question is—What about Bernard?'

It was curious to notice the sharp and sudden alteration of her look. She had been quite pleasant and *débonnaire:*

even her scanning of his appearance was not unfriendly; her cynical confidences were uttered in perfect good-nature. But the mere mention of Bernard's name sufficed to change all that in an instant. When next she spoke there was a baleful fire in her eyes, and her mouth was drawn and hard.

'I had half-forgotten,' she said, with a kind of laugh. 'Seeing you so smart, I fancied you had come to take me to the theatre. I had almost forgotten Mr. Bernard. One will forget one's best friends sometimes.'

She went to the sideboard, opened a drawer, took out a photograph, and, bringing it back, threw it on the table before Foster.

'There, do you know who that is?' she said, with another ironical laugh.

It was a portrait of a thin, wizened, prematurely old-looking young man, who was dressed as if he was going to a wedding, with a large 'button-hole' in his frock-coat.

'Well, you might call *him* a swell, now, if you like,' Foster said. 'Bought this out of a shop-window, I suppose? You see what it is to be famous. Cabinet Ministers, Archbishops, and jockeys; I suppose Joe Cantly was in excellent company.'

'You may suppose anything you like,' she retorted, 'but don't you imagine I bought that out of any shop-window. Oh no, that is a present from Mr. Joe himself. And that is the footing we are on now.'

'You've seen him?' he said quickly.

'Very much,' was the collected answer. 'Charlie Bernard was over at Redcar. Joe was quite pleased to see an old friend. And you should have heard him swear on his honour as a gentleman—his honour as a gentleman—that not a living soul should know I had spoken to him. Now what do you suppose a jockey's "honour as a gentleman" is worth? Can you put a price on it? No; I don't want to say anything against the young man; he was very friendly with me, very grateful; I believe I could bring tears to his eyes by appealing to his noble sentiments. Wouldn't you like to see that? I should. Fancy a jock with tears in his eyes—his hand clasped on his heart——'

'Yes, but did he say anything?' Foster interrupted.

'Yes,' she said slowly; 'he told me that the rumours they have been putting about that Jackson will never be able to bring Roscrawn thoroughly sound to the post are all gammon. The horse is as fit as a fiddle. That might be a good thing for you, eh? But I suppose you're not doing much business with the pencillers at present?'

'You know that is not what I asked you,' he said peevishly.

'Well,' she said, 'you and I must understand each other, Master Fred. I should want to see you in a rather more secure position before chancing anything. How much time do you want? I confess I am in no great hurry. If I go for Charlie Bernard at all, it will be a thorough thing, I can tell you; and I can bide my time.

Indeed, there's nothing else to be done at present. With Goodwood, Brighton, and Lewes over, there's nothing worth mentioning now till the Leger—except the Ebor Handicap, and Cantly says that Bernard has no great faith in Red Manual.'

'He's not going to back Red Manual?' Foster exclaimed—but this was really intended to give her the notion that information of the kind was becoming valuable to him.

'To no great extent, anyway, if the immaculate Joe is to be believed. So that's not to be thought of. No, no; as I say, I'm going to take my time; Joe and I are far, far, far from being sufficiently friendly as yet; and as for you—you're no use to me as you are.'

It was plain speaking, but he did not wince.

'You want time for yourself. Give me the same,' he said; and then he added, 'I suppose you have some engagement for this evening.'

'I? Not I. I only came to town this morning.'

'You spoke of the theatre,' he said rather nervously. 'What do you say, now, to coming and dining with me at a restaurant, and then I will send up a commissionaire to one of the Bond Street agencies to secure a box?'

She was inclined to look upon this as a piece of bravado; but guessed that perhaps he had fallen in with a little money somewhere. And he had; for the fifty pounds had somewhat unexpectedly arrived from Buckinghamshire; and

Foster was determined to make this go as far as possible in showing evidence of his bettering condition. How much would Mrs. Fairservice imagine lay behind that little offer of a dinner and a box at the theatre?

'No; we'll divide that programme into two halves,' she said. 'You may go and see about the box now; I will order a bit of dinner for us here. What o'clock is it?'

Perhaps this was sarcasm; she could see that his watch-pocket was empty.

'I have left my watch at home,' he said. 'But I should fancy it must be close on six.'

'Then go and get the box,' she said. 'And I will order dinner for 6.30. We may as well see the farce, if there is one; and I have good, healthy, old-fashioned tastes.'

Now not only did Mr. Foster go and secure for himself an expensive box at one of the best theatres, but also he went round by Covent Garden and purchased for Mrs. Fairservice a very beautiful bouquet. He himself carried it back with him to the hotel; and, when he presented it, there was no apparent cynicism in the smile of thanks with which she received it. Perhaps she was a little bit impressed by this display of affluence, despite her habitual shrewdness. At all events, here he was in London; and with so little fear of being laid by the heels, or otherwise interfered with, that he was proposing to go to a public theatre.

Indeed, as they sat at dinner, she became much more

frank with him about her relations with Cantly, and her plans for working upon these. Once or twice, too, she seemed to imply that she was counting upon his—that is, upon Foster's—confederacy; and so anxious was he to assure her of his being a person worthy of trust that he would not, at first, touch a drop of wine.

'What's up now?' she said, when he refused.

'I don't wish to provoke any more complimentary remarks,' he answered.

'Oh, about the look of your eyes?' she said. 'If it comes to that, I would sooner see you drinking wine than drugging yourself with chloral. How long have you been at it?'

'How long have I been at it!' he repeated. 'How long does a fit of toothache last? About a century, I suppose.'

'Well, it must have been a pretty long fit to have altered your appearance so,' she said shrewdly. 'I fancied you looked rather white about the gills when we met at Scarborough. And that's not like you. You used to keep yourself in pretty fit condition.'

'I am as well as ever I was in my life,' he said, bluntly. 'And I will take some wine—I would rather do that than be picked to pieces.'

'Oh, I didn't mean to offend,' she said, good-naturedly. 'It was only a little polite inquiry. And by the way, Master Fred, it has occurred to me that, in view of certain possibilities in the future, it would be as well for you and

me not to be seen together at that theatre to-night. One or other of us must keep in a safe corner in the box.'

'I quite agree with you,' he said, quickly. 'And as I haven't evening dress on, I'll keep in the background.'

In due course of time Mrs. Fairservice's carriage was summoned, and they drove to the theatre, where, if he remained discreetly withdrawn from the public gaze, she was very much *en évidence* indeed, with her opera-glass and fan and bouquet. It is to be feared that he did not pay great heed to the performances that followed. He had learned a good deal that evening. It was abundantly clear that, whoever might help him out of his present straits, that person was not Mrs. Fairservice. Further than that, it was just as clear that she would have him produce a pecuniary clean bill of health before accepting him as her coadjutor. On the other hand, she still seemed to count on his assistance; there was some little time yet in which to prove himself eligible for the honourable post; and the more he studied the possibilities of the scheme she was planning, the more he saw what a splendid *coup* it would prove for himself, if properly managed. But in the meanwhile the paramount need was money. Money must be got at all or any hazards—if only to stay the mouths of the wolves who were hunting him.

When he had safely escorted Mrs. Fairservice back to her hotel, and made an appointment to see her that day week, he walked away up Regent Street to the Rocham-

beau Club, and asked if Mr. John Russell were within. The Rochambeau was a small club, of somewhat shady reputation, and chiefly devoted to baccarat, écarté, poker, and billiards. At this hour—a little after eleven—it seemed deserted: looking through the glass panels of the inner doors, Foster could only see one or two young men dawdling about, in evening dress and crush-hats, and apparently just arrived from the theatre.

However, one of these did happen to be Mr. Johnny Russell, who, when summoned by the waiter, came leisurely along into the outer hall, chewing a toothpick, and looking at once surprised and amused.

'Well, this is a fair piece of bluff, this is,' he said.

'I had to chance it—there was no help for it,' was Foster's answer.

'No, no,' the flabby and white-cheeked young man said facetiously, 'I can hardly believe it. What do you hold in your hand? Three aces and a pair I'll be bound. Or a straight flush? You've got something to show.'

'I wish I had,' Foster said bitterly. 'I've come to town to ask you to do for me what Raby sneaked out of. A shabbier trick was never played. Your excuses for him only make it worse; for he never need have undertaken it at all, if he didn't mean it.'

'Have a drink,' said Mr. Russell, coolly. 'That is one of the advantages of a proprietary club; you can have anything, at any time, and for anybody, that will put a penny in

the manager's pocket. Or a bit of supper? The fellows haven't come in yet; there's nothing doing.'

'No, I would rather not go into the Club.'

Russell laughed.

'The cavalier in hiding—good subject for a picture.'

Foster considered the pleasantry rather ill-timed, but was glad enough to find Johnny Russell in good-humour.

'Come out for a bit of a stroll,' he said. 'We can talk without risk of being overheard.'

Russell put on a light overcoat, and together they went out: the dusky thoroughfares around Hanover Square gave them ample opportunity of uninterrupted conversation.

'Are you going to stand my friend, Jack?' was Foster's plain question.

'To what tune?' was the equally plain answer.

'Well, if you will lend me £300—if I can show it—I can put my hand on another £200; and that together surely should pacify them in the meantime——'

'£300!' the other said, in less friendly fashion. 'Why, Raby never suggested anything so much as that.'

'No, because he didn't know what a chance I had,' Foster said eagerly. 'He thought it was merely to put me on my legs again. But it isn't that. I daren't tell you what the chance is—but it's a very big thing——'

'Oh yes, it's always so,' the younger man said, evidently disliking the whole situation. 'And perhaps it is a

good chance. But you know, Foster, I don't quite see why I should pay in order to let you have another gamble.'

'It isn't gambling at all!' Foster protested—and he was earnest enough on this occasion—'it is giving me a helping hand to let me get my head above water—and just when there is a fresh start offered me. Besides, man, you will be paid—every farthing.'

'It's easy to say that,' the other grumbled.

'Oh, but this time it really is all right. As soon as Sir Anthony Zembra comes back from Antwerp my wife is going to him to get him to increase her allowance—there's the grandson to be considered, you see—and out of that increase she will pay you back the whole of the £300, if you only give her time. I need not appear in it at all. The instalments—monthly or quarterly, as you please—will be forwarded by her. It is as safe as the bank!'

'How do you know that Sir Anthony will give your wife what she asks?' the other said, still suspicious.

'Why, he's bound to! But I'll tell you what—wait and see. I am content to abide by the result.'

'Who is to let me know?' Johnny Russell said, rather coldly.

This was so plain an intimation that Foster's word might not be considered as all-sufficient, that for a second or two he was rather at a loss. But presently he said: 'Why, it's very simple. Will you be content with this? If

my wife writes to you and says she is in a position to pay you so much a quarter, and will do so, will that satisfy you?'

'Yes, certainly.'

'And you will let me have the money?'

'Yes.'

'It's a bargain, then,' Foster said, with evident relief. 'Mind you, old fellow, I haven't said much about gratitude and all that, but I don't forget such things. It's when a fellow is down that he feels them most. Come,' he said presently, 'there's a public-house down there. Let's have a brandy-and-soda on the strength of this. I've been at the theatre this evening with a Mrs. Fairservice—and doing propriety. I should like a drink.'

'Public-house brandy,' said Johnny Russell rather gloomily. 'Why didn't you have it at the Club?'

'Oh, it's all the same—it's all corn and potato spirit,' Foster said cheerfully. 'It will be quite a new sensation for me to stand treat at a counter—a remembrance of old days, when you had got hold of a thirsty bookie and wanted him to give you something like Christian prices. The worst of these places is that their spirits are so diluted that you can hardly taste them; the only way is to have a double dose.'

So Foster and his friend went into the Private Bar and had their drink there, though Johnny Russell did not seem to like the look of this unfamiliar place.

'And how long are you going to face it out in London?' the latter asked. 'It's pretty cheeky, you know.'

'Yes, I believe you,' Foster said—to whom a deep draught of the brown brandy and soda-water seemed to have imparted a new animation. 'But I am quite aware that the atmosphere of the metropolis of England is much too sultry for my constitution: I'm off to-morrow or next day. I shall vanish like a ghost—until I hear it's all right about the £300; and then I'll get you £200, and give you a list of people—the Jennings, and Jim Deane, and a lot of them, and you'll have to do your best to bring them to reason. I know you will do it far better than Raby. They would suspect him. He's too keen a file all the way round. But they must know you have nothing to gain; shan't we have a jolly little dinner, old man, when I can come back clear and safe—at the Bristol, eh?—the old room?——'

There was a kind of incoherence about his talk and manner; though that could hardly be attributed to drink, for he had taken very little wine at dinner, and had since touched nothing till now.

'Where are you off to, then?' his companion said.

'Oh, I'll find some safe quarters somewhere—where I can see a morning gallop or two. Not in Yorkshire, though, I hope; just you believe me, I had a baddish time of it when I was there. I never was so down on my luck——'

'You're not looking very well after it, anyway,' Russell said, regarding him with his pale, lack-lustre eyes. 'No, by Jove, you're not looking up to the mark.'

'Neither would you be, I daresay,' Foster rejoined, with simulated cheerfulness. 'Well, old man, you're off back to the Club, I suppose. I'm going down home to try and get some sleep. I've had some bad nights lately.'

Outside the public-house there were a few final words of undertaking and direction; and then they parted, and went their several ways.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE INTERPOSING HAND

'MOTHER,' cried Janie, bustling into the old-fashioned little dining-room in Kensington Square, and just a little breathless, either from some unusual excitement, or from quick walking, 'here's a splendid project, now! Phil has sent me down to tell you, for we want you to help; and if only we succeed, won't you be as pleased as any of us! Of course it's about Sabie; you may be sure of that. You can't tell how distressed Phil and I have been about her since we saw her last. Why, she has become quite a different creature from the Sabie we used to know—you remember how proud and merry and self-confident she used to be—a queen wherever she went; and now she is nervous and terrified and cowed: fancy our Sabie being cowed—by a whipper-snapper like that! But it's all through her passionate love of her boy; her alarm seems to have got the better of her reason altogether; you never saw anything like it. I believe Foster could make her sing in the streets if he chose; and I believe he would do it, if he thought he could get any money by it.'

'But about the project, Janie?'

'I am coming to that. I had a letter from Walter Lindsay this morning. He has been away in Canada; that is why we have not heard from him for so long. And now, he says, as we have been talking of paying our first visit to Scotland, his place in Wigtonshire is entirely at our disposal, if Phil and I think of going round that way. Isn't it good of him? His brother-in-law, who lives near, looks after the property for him; but there is no one living in the house. He says it is a small place; but the grounds are pretty; and there is a lake not far off where we can have the use of a boat. Well, we had been rather undecided about going north; but that decided it; nothing ever came in so handy. You remember I told you Phil had been asked by some rich picture-buyer he knows—I forget his name—to visit him this autumn at his place in Islay; and there are to be three Academicians there, for the fishing and shooting; and Phil rather wanted to see what that kind of life in the Highlands was like—looking on, of course, for I shouldn't think he would be much use with a rod or a gun. But where could he leave me, that was the question. I wasn't in the invitation; I never saw the man; and the notion of my dawdling in a hotel in a Scotch town until Phil came back didn't strike either of us as fascinating. And now do you see how Mr. Lindsay's offer clenched the matter?'

'At any rate I cannot understand how any one should have two houses hanging useless on his hands like that,'

Mrs. Wygram said. 'Why doesn't he come back to his own country?'

Janie sighed.

'Why? He says he gets fresh material over there; and sells his pictures easily. But I don't think it is that that keeps him on the other side of the Atlantic.'

'You have not said anything of Sabie in all this,' her mother reminded her.

Janie brightened up instantly.

'The moment we had settled the matter so far, Phil said to me "Now, look here, if your mother could only persuade Mrs. Foster to give up the charge of her child to her for that time, what is to hinder your beloved Sabie from coming along with us? I will pay her travelling expenses; Foster would have the whole of her income while she was away; he wouldn't object. And then if that place in Wigtonshire turned out to be a niceish sort of place, Sabie and you could remain there till I got back from Islay." Mother, just think of it!' said Janie, with a little laugh of delight. 'Think of Sabie and me walking over the hills, and rowing in a boat on the lake, and running about the garden. It is just a dream of happiness. And then, when Phil comes back, we will all go on together to Edinburgh, I suppose. Edinburgh and Melrose Abbey; these are the two things I stipulate for. Phil can settle all the rest.'

'And my share,' said Mrs. Wygram, with a smile, 'is to take charge of the boy in London.'

'Ah, but we knew you would gladly do that for Sabie's sake,' her daughter said. 'When Phil proposed that she should come with us, he was thinking of me. She was to be a travelling companion for me. But that is not what I am looking forward to. I am looking forward to getting her away for a while from that man; to see if we cannot give her back a little of the cheerfulness and courage of the Sabie of old days. Of course, it will take a fearful amount of coaxing before she will agree to part with the child, even for that short time. You will have to talk her over, mother; or shall we go down together? You see, as soon as Phil has finished the last of the cartoons for Verner Castle, we shall be free; and although that won't be in time for him to see the shooting on the Twelfth—that is the great day, he says—still, we should get north as soon as possible. You'll come to see us off at Euston, mother, won't you? We may have to buy some rugs and wraps for Sabie; for it's always so cold in Scotland, they say. Oh, won't it be fine in that railway carriage; Phil may fall in love with her, if he likes; I don't care.'

'Yes, that's all very well,' the mother said (and yet she was quite willing to accept her somewhat invidious share in this arrangement), 'but you are putting all the difficulties on to me. It isn't the taking care of the little boy here—that we could manage well enough; it's the talking Sabie over; and I don't think I shall succeed in that.'

'But we must succeed and we shall succeed, mother,'

Janie said. 'Phil has to go down to Verner Castle this week; as soon as he has fixed the day, I will let you know, and we will take that day to go to Witstead. And if you can't talk her into saying yes, I will force her.'

'You force her!' the mother said, with a smile.

'Oh yes, I can,' Janie said confidently. 'Sabie has none of her old masterful ways now. I am going to take the management of her. I will compel her to come with us.'

'Don't be too harsh with her, Janie.'

'That is so very likely!'

Then she went away with her brain very busy; and Kensington High Street became a place of dreams. What ideas Janie had formed of the region

> *'Where the kingdom of Galloway's blest*
> *With the smell of bog-myrtle and peat,'*

it is hard to say; but, like most people who have never crossed the Cheviots, she probably considered Scotland as synonymous with the Highlands; and no doubt had already romantic visions in her mind of beetling crags and lofty mountains and precipitous waterfalls. Had she been told that the people of Galloway wore the kilt and talked Gaelic she would scarcely have been surprised. But that was not the point. In these roseate forecasts of hers she was thinking less of the character of the country and its inhabitants than of her travelling about in the constant society of Sabina; that was to be the charm of this excursion, whatever the scenery or the people might be like. And she

could not but be struck by the curious reversal of their positions. It was Sabina who was now to be the petted and protected one—Sabina, who used to be so headstrong in her good-humoured fashion, so self-reliant, so imperious and arbitrary in her very kindness. She could hardly think of that gay-hearted, wilful, radiant creature as being one and the same person with the poor, trembling, terror-stricken mother who had come to them but the other day, white-faced and haggard-eyed, to ask them whether her boy could be taken away from her.

But all these plans and forecasts were to be rudely and suddenly scattered. When she returned home, she was surprised to find her husband in the house; ordinarily, at this time of the day, he was busy in the studio. Moreover, he was clearly waiting for her.

'Janie,' he said, 'I have opened a letter sent to you. I saw by the outside it might contain news that—that would startle you. I thought it better to open it——'

For a second her heart stood still with fear. In his hand there was an envelope that was black-bordered.

'Not Sabie?' she cried.

'No,' he answered gravely. 'No, but her husband——'

He handed her the envelope; and quickly and breathlessly she opened it; and took out the contents. These were merely a cutting from a Yorkshire newspaper, containing the customary list of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, and at the foot of the middle section was the laconic

announcement: 'On the 9th instant, at Market Hatley, Mr. Fred Foster, aged 29 years.' And then, on the margin of the paper, were a few words in a trembling handwriting that she recognised easily enough—

'DEAREST JANIE—Don't come to me just yet. I will write.—S.'

Janie looked frightened only for a moment; presently a kind of wonder shone in her face.

'Oh Phil,' she cried, in accents that certainly did not betray much sorrow, 'Sabie will come back to us—to Kensington Square—or here—will she come and live with us here? Just think of it! We will have the old days back again—and—and I will go at once and telegraph to Walter Lindsay!'

'You will do nothing of the kind; you will do nothing so unseemly,' her husband said at once. 'Are you out of your senses? And I don't think you need make it a matter of rejoicing that you should hear of the death of a fellow-creature.'

'Oh no, I don't—at least, I wouldn't, before other people,' said Janie, rather incoherently. 'But I thought there was no more hope in this world for my poor Sabie—and now there is—surely, surely there is, Phil. And why may not I go and see her now? Perhaps she has gone away north to the funeral? Then why didn't she telegraph to me to go down and take charge of the boy?

I'm sure I would have done it instantly. But most likely old Mr. Foster is arranging everything for her.'

And then again she said, 'Don't be angry with me, Phil; but how can you expect me to be sorry? If you only knew as I know what she has suffered! And why may not I send a message to Mr. Lindsay?'

'You know very well,' her husband said. 'Before even the dead man is in his grave! And how do you know it would be welcome? It will be much better for you to leave things alone.'

'I don't see how it could do any harm,' Janie said, wistfully.

'And there's another thing I may warn you about. When you do go to see your friend just you take care what you say about her deceased husband—if you want to remain her friend. It's wonderful how a woman's opinions are apt to change in a matter of this kind. She will let her husband ill-use her for years—she may have her eyes perfectly open to all his bad and mean qualities; but as soon as he goes and mercifully dies, it's wonderful how soon all these things are forgotten, and the dear departed becomes sanctified into a hero. It isn't reasonable, of course; but it's human nature; and although you used always to try to make out your Sabie to be a perfect goddess, without a fault, I consider her to be a very womanly woman; and I shouldn't at all be surprised if she were to begin now and look back with regret and remorse on her treatment of Foster.'

'Her treatment of Foster!' Janie exclaimed.

'Yes; I say it, and I mean it. She will accuse herself of not having humoured him sufficiently, of having shown him indifference or neglect—a hundred things; and she will think of all that was best about him; and blame herself for the failure of their married life. So you be warned in time. Don't you say a word against him; and don't look as if the news rather pleased you.'

She was rather impressed by these words of counsel.

'I suppose what you say is quite right, Phil,' she said, submissively.

But she had to go and do some shopping; and the moment she was out of the house this moderating influence seemed to fall away from her. For she was thinking over all that had happened since Sabina's marriage; and again she saw the anguish-stricken face of the mother dreading to be robbed of her child; and again the cry rang through her brain—'Is there no pity sitting in the clouds!' 'There is!—there is!—there is!' Janie passionately said to herself; and she had no remorse whatever in rejoicing; the news, she declared to herself, and would hold to it, was good news.

She had to pass a telegraph-office, and there she paused for a second in wistful hesitation. It seemed such a pity that Walter Lindsay should not know. The message need not be meant as a summons to him to come back to his own country. It would merely be information.

How could it be unwelcome, in that sense? Say, at the worst, that he was engaged to be married to some one else, he could not have quite forgotten his old regard for Sabina. Surely he would be interested in learning of her fortunes. Men were fickle, as she had heard; there had been great distances of time and space between these two; he had no right to cherish any feeling warmer than friendship for a woman who had married. But even friendship? Would not any friend of Sabie's be interested? And surely Walter Lindsay (if she understood him) most of all? So Janie argued with herself, loitering there irresolute; and then she remembered her husband's charge to her; and tore herself reluctantly away.

Indeed, she was rather proud of herself in that she could thus calmly consider the hypothesis of Walter Lindsay being engaged to be married; but, oddly enough, er next proceeding was to stop in front of a shop-window where were exhibited a number of portraits of ladies of the great world and of the stage, and to set about asking herself whether any one of them could be compared to Sabina. This one had a royal carriage of the head; that was pensive-looking, with mysterious dark eyes; the other was bright, vivacious, coquettish-looking. But where was the one of them who had Sabina's charm, her bland gentleness, her gracious repose? And then the next thing was to wonder if Walter Lindsay would find Sabina as beautiful as he had thought her in the former days? Philip said she

was more beautiful; but then Philip worshipped the *Mater dolorosa* type in women; and Janie was not at all anxious that Lindsay should be struck with that aspect of Sabina. Oh no; long before he should set eyes on her, Sabie would be back in Kensington Square; the rose-leaf tint would be returning to her cheeks and lips; there would be a subdued light of happiness in the calm and benignant eyes. As for Sabina's golden-brown hair, that was still as beautiful and abundant as ever—not all her troubles had sufficed to interweave in it a single silver streak.

Janie got her shopping done, somehow; and then she sped away home; and sought the quietude of her own room. She was rather a superstitious young person, in a half-doubting, whimsical way; and on occasion was accustomed to consult the *sortes Virgilianæ;* although, not being able to read Virgil, she had to substitute the Scriptures, as the early Christians did. It may be added that she was not strictly methodical in her divination; for, instead of taking the first passage that met her eyes, she claimed the right of searching the whole of the chance-opened page for an appropriate verse—a practice which frequently got rid of enigmas and brought her instead some little comfort.

So now, taking the small Bible that lay on her dressing-table, she shut her eyes, and opened the leaves at random. When she came to look, it was a chapter of Isaiah that lay before her, and quickly she glanced over the verses. This one was the last on the page—and Janie's heart was

rejoiced and glad as she read and reread the divine promise of better things for the wasted and sorrowing city of Jerusalem—'*O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted! behold I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires!*'

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